



**MenEngage Alliance**

working with men and boys for gender equality

# **Contexts and Challenges** for Gender Transformative Work with Men and Boys

## A Discussion Paper

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# Acronyms

<b>AWID</b>	Association for Women's Rights in Development	<b>MRAs</b>	Men's Rights Activists (commonly used term for anti-feminist men and men's groups)
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	<b>MSM</b>	Men who have sex with men
<b>CPD</b>	United Nations Commission on Population and Development	<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization	<b>PME&amp;L</b>	Planning, monitoring, evaluation & learning
<b>CSW</b>	United Nations Commission on the Status of Women	<b>SC</b>	Steering Committee
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based Violence	<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>GS</b>	MenEngage Global Secretariat	<b>Sida</b>	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
<b>GTA</b>	Gender transformative approaches	<b>SOGIESC</b>	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics
<b>HRC</b>	Human Rights Council	<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
<b>ICPD</b>	International Conference on Population and Development	<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>IMAGES</b>	International Men and Gender Equality Survey	<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>INGO</b>	International non-governmental organization	<b>UNGASS</b>	Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly
<b>IPPF</b>	International Planned Parenthood Federation	<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>KM&amp;C</b>	Knowledge Management and Communications	<b>UPR</b>	Universal Periodic Review of the Human Right Council
<b>LGBTQIA+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, allied/asexual/ aromantic/agender	<b>VAW</b>	Violence against women
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa	<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding	<b>WILPF</b>	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

# Executive Summary

Gender justice  
Political Contexts  
Economic Contexts  
Social Contexts  
Digital Contexts  
Operational Contexts  
Ways Forward

It is 25 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women and its adoption of the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. For all of those who are committed to the visions of gender equality, human rights and social justice expressed in the Beijing Platform for Action and subsequent international declarations and agreements, 2020 was to have been a year of taking stock of progress made and debating priorities and strategies to advance towards these visions. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has derailed such plans, laying bare the fault-lines of profound injustice and inequality, which determine who suffers and who prospers.

The gender dimensions of these fault-lines of injustice and inequalities are now well documented. But if the COVID-related crises of public health, economic recession and governance failures signal a critical juncture, threatening any progress that has been made toward gender equality, human rights and social justice, it is also true that such crises have been long in the making. In the face of these crises, feminist, LGBTQIA+, climate and social justice movements have been leading struggles for systemic change. The question that confronts us at the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium is how best gender transformative work with men and boys can both contribute and be accountable to these gender justice and other movements. This Discussion Paper seeks to spark critical reflection on the political, economic and socio-cultural

forces confronting the world today, shaping the contexts in which our work on transforming patriarchal masculinities and engaging men and boys for gender and social justice takes place. We do not claim to have all the answers, but we do want to raise questions about what these contexts mean for the kinds of work that are needed to transform patriarchal masculinities.

## Gender justice: The need for systemic change

In the 25 years since the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, an unprecedented mobilization across feminist civil society, national governments and multi-lateral institutions has ensured that the injustices of gender inequalities have become a central focus of work on human rights and sustainable development. Yet, feminist activists from social movements across the world continue to highlight the extent to which progress made since the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action is threatened, and in some cases reversed. The forces ranged against progressive efforts to address gender injustice are formidable. The Women's Rights Caucus, a global coalition of over 200 organizations working to advance women's rights and gender equality in their communities and together at the United Nations, expresses "grave concern at the rise of authoritarianism, fascism, nationalism, xenophobia, supremacist ideologies,

and fundamentalism worldwide” and that the “neoliberal economic order is a key structural barrier that since 1995 has exacerbated inequalities within and between countries and among genders.”<sup>1</sup>

The forces threatening progress on all women’s and girls’ human rights and gender justice more broadly are, in many ways, being intensified by COVID-19 and reactions to it. In response, both inside and outside of formal political structures and processes, feminist movements are organizing around a transformative vision of intersectional gender justice, grounded in commitments to social justice, human security, and economic and political transformation. Feminist organizing has always involved and targeted men and boys, and in global policy-making spaces, there has been a steady uptake of language on engaging men and boys towards advancing women’s and girls’ human rights and fundamental freedoms. Over time, this language has become more nuanced, moving from calls to simply “engage” men and boys to more specific statements about the roles and responsibilities of men and boys within policy agendas on issues such as gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), unpaid care work, and Women, Peace and Security.

There is evidence, too, that gender

equality work with men and boys can be effective in changing personal attitudes and behaviors. But this emphasis on attitudinal and behavioral change has been critiqued by many both within and outside the field of gender justice work with men and boys as paying insufficient attention to the transformative vision of gender justice movements and their strategies for systemic change. This concern about a lack of focus on structural barriers to gender justice is linked to a concern that work with men and boys, as it has expanded over the last 25 years, has too often been too separate from gender justice work with women and girls and LGBTQIA+ communities.

What it means to do feminist-informed and gender-transformative work with men and boys, in solidarity with broader gender justice movements, remains the key question facing the members of MenEngage Alliance, and our constituent networks, Global Secretariat and the Board. In light of the radical systems change agenda being advanced by gender justice movements, it is clear that any articulation of the meaning and practice of gender transformative work with men and boys on patriarchal masculinities must reflect on the political, economic and socio-cultural forces shaping gender hierarchies and relations of power more generally, and the opportunities and constraints produced by these forces.

1 Women’s Rights Caucus. 2019. “Feminist Declaration on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women.” Women’s Rights Caucus. p1



In the sections that follow, these forces are briefly sketched, and their potential implications for the work of the Alliance members, partners and those involved in the work to engage men and boys in gender equality discussed.

## Political Contexts: Authoritarianism, Ethnonationalism and Militarism

Women's exclusion from political life has long been central to patriarchy. Feminist progress in rejecting these patriarchal norms and demanding political rights and power for women is increasingly being met with patriarchal backlash, evident in the rise to power of openly misogynistic authoritarian 'strongmen' in a number of countries. Associated with these developments is a conservative discourse of 'family values', organized around a patriarchal binary of masculine authority and feminine domesticity. Anti-feminism is fundamental to this growing authoritarianism.

This ideology of family values is usually associated with conservative, right-wing, and far-right political parties and formations. But scholarly work is revealing the extent to which such family values have been at the heart of neoliberal political visions and economic reforms, and their attack on the idea of the 'social'. In this vision, there is no society, but only individuals and their families. Ideas about

and representations of masculinities have been bound up in complicated ways with neoliberalism's family values and their diminution of society. On the one hand, the privatization of the State's social responsibilities centered public policy attention on the family and its functioning, especially in contexts where the promotion of women's individual economic empowerment had become an important aspect of neoliberal reform. The growth of "responsible fatherhood" programming from the 1990s onwards should thus be understood in relation to neoliberalism's retreat from social provisioning.

On the other hand, the "attack on the social" associated with neoliberalism has helped create a democratic void in many countries, hollowing out political parties and processes and reducing them to the technocratic functions of economic management. The 2008 recession threw this model of technocratic governance into crisis, and into the political void has stepped a range of anti-democratic, authoritarian leaders and forces, whose claim to restore order looks to the 'natural' hierarchy of the patriarchal family and the protector role of its father figure/s as the basis of their legitimacy.

The reliance of authoritarian politics on a model of social order based on the 'natural' hierarchy and presumed stability of the heteronormative family explains the prominence given to countering what conservative and far-right forces term "gender ideology". Such forces frequently

depict feminists and LGBTQIA+ activists as among the most dangerous threats to the social order because they challenge the patriarchal authority embedded in the heteronormative family.

At the same time, the metaphor of the nation as family has been commonly used in the rise of an ethnonationalist politics in many parts of the world. Those who are deemed not to belong to the national 'family' are framed as threats to the social order. Such 'outsiders', whether indigenous or minority communities, immigrants or refugees, are depicted as wholly Other; in other words, they are racialized as being culturally incompatible with and inferior to those who 'naturally' belong to the nation. Images of and ideas about masculinities are used frequently in this racialization. Such racialized interpretations and understanding of masculinities are put to ideological work by ethnonationalist parties and forces in calling on the white/majority population to defend 'their' women, families and by extension, nation, from this threat posed by the male Other.

An intensified nationalism, with anxieties about borders, migrants and globalized supply chains, has also been provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic. Feminist activists and scholars continue to note the ways in which this nationalist rhetoric of control and protection is both masculinized and militarized; nationalism, militarism and patriarchal masculinities have always been closely linked. The militarist metaphors of "fighting" the virus serve as another reminder of how deeply fused are militarism and patriarchal masculinities. Military weapons and military involvement have long been ways for men to prove 'their' masculinity. At the same time, military institutions rely on images and narratives of patriarchal masculinities for their recruitment and internal 'culture'.

This fusion of militarism and patriarchal masculinities highlights the importance of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda to the feminist systems change agenda discussed earlier. But the power of the global military-industrial complex, and its associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities, continues to inhibit progress on the WPS agenda and its gendered human security paradigm. Given the above, it is clear that intensified efforts to challenge and transform patriarchal and militarized masculinities are urgently

needed. But what these efforts should look like in practice remains in question. There is a concern that the ways in which issues of masculinities are being framed in the context of the WPS agenda runs the risk of reinforcing the depoliticizing effects of the “good men” approach, by “reinforcing harmful narratives that violence is caused by a few bad men who consciously hold misogynist beliefs about women.”<sup>2</sup>

Identifying and implementing responses to the contexts and challenges outlined above will be ongoing work for all involved with MenEngage Alliance. Feminist and LGBTQIA+ organizations are confronting the patriarchal backlash in national and regional policy spaces, which MenEngage networks at regional and national levels must be active in supporting. Given our role in fostering a community of practice for this work, MenEngage Alliance has an opportunity to support members in learning how best to take gender transformative work with men and boys into political processes and spaces, including political parties themselves. MenEngage members also need to be alert to the ways in which “Positive Fatherhood” programming has been enlisted by neoliberalism’s “attack on the social”. Building stronger partnerships with anti-racist movements, indigenous people’s struggles and immigrant and refugee rights organizations to confront the use of racialized masculinities by

ethnonationalist forces should also be an urgent priority for MenEngage members, partners and those doing this work. So too is the continuing need to highlight the interdependence of militarism and military-industrial complex with the maintenance of patriarchal masculinities. As the COVID-19 pandemic has only further highlighted, a masculinized militarist mindset is widespread across many aspects of not only military but also civilian life. Through its community of practice, MenEngage Alliance would explore ways to develop our knowledge base, political stance and share lessons as to how best to challenge and transform patriarchal and militarized masculinities.

## Economic Contexts: Neoliberalism, Climate Crisis and Care Economies

Poverty and economic marginalization are deeply gendered. For several decades now, women’s economic empowerment has been a centerpiece of Gender and Development policy and programming. Although progress has been made, it has been accompanied by soaring inequalities. UN Women reports that “in a world where wealth and assets are increasingly concentrated and controlled by a fraction of the global population, women’s gains have been uneven between countries, and

2 Duriesmith, David. 2017. “Engaging Men and Boys in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Beyond the “Good Men” Industry.” LSE Women, Peace and Security Working Paper Series. London: London School of Economics. p10

among different groups of women.”<sup>3</sup> These soaring inequalities and uneven gains produced by neoliberal capitalism have long been the target of feminist critique and struggle. As a 2019 feminist convening in Mexico City made clear, neoliberal policies “have exacerbated existing inequalities of power, particularly along the fault lines of resource and wealth disparities between countries, between rich and poor, between men and women, and between dominant and oppressed racial and ethnic groups.”<sup>4</sup>

Gender justice work with men on issues of women’s economic marginalization has, for the most part, yet to catch up with this broader systemic analysis, led by feminists from the Global South and feminists from communities of color and indigenous communities in the Global North. Still confined within an individualized neoliberal paradigm of women’s empowerment and entrepreneurship, work with men has been framed in terms of reducing their opposition to such empowerment. But this framing only masks the deeper and entwined problems of gender and economic injustice produced by neoliberal capitalism.

Answering the question of what these structural analyses and systemic critiques mean for gender justice work with men and boys is an urgent priority. The importance of building the capacity to exercise collective economic power directs attention to the potential for work with labor unions. It also highlights the need to recognize not only gender differences but also class solidarities. The informalization of work, lack of labour protections and deepening of inequalities affects millions of working class men as well as working class women. Rapid urbanization is only compounding this poverty, dislocation and exploitation. On the one hand, these long-term trends make clear the shared interests that millions of workers, of all genders, have in pushing for fundamental economic reform. On the other hand, the tying of masculinities to waged work means that the growth of precarious, under-employment can often be experienced as a crisis of masculinity. These economic concerns of marginalized men, tied

3 UN Women. 2019. “Progress of the World’s Women 2019-2020: Families in a Changing World.” New York: UN Women. p15

4 Anon. 2019. “Women Radically Transforming a World in Crisis: A Framework for Beijing+25 Shaped at a Strategy Meeting of Feminist Activists.” Mexico City, Mexico. p2

to their expectations of and sense of entitlement to waged work, are being exploited for politically regressive purposes in many societies. Building cross-gender class solidarities to challenge the exploitation and inequalities produced by the current neoliberal economic order must involve efforts to change the persistent and dominant narrative that connects masculinity to waged work in many societies.

The current neoliberal economic system is not only wrecking lives, but destroying the basis of life for future generations. Climate change is one of the most urgent global challenges facing the world today. Of particular concern to MenEngage Alliance, and our commitment to transform patriarchal masculinities, is the long-standing eco-feminist analysis of climate change as rooted in histories of colonial resource extraction and capitalist industrial production, which themselves are shaped and legitimated by a patriarchal logic of domination and exploitation. The masculinization of industrial production and extractivist economies means that the “green transition” must involve transformation in gender narratives about the future of work. Such a transition must also contend with the male-dominated corporate and State elites who benefit from the current neoliberal economic order, and the violence they unleash to protect their vested interests.

The degradation of livelihoods and biospheres produced by climate change is also fueling an unprecedented displacement and movement of people, both within and between countries and across continents. As many studies have shown, women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people face many forms of violence and exploitation at all stages of their journeys as migrants and refugees, from State officials, military personnel and criminal gangs alike. Research also reveals that male migrants and refugees are also the target of sexual violence. In thinking through the links between patriarchal masculinities and climate catastrophe, it is evident that the many forms of gender-based violences and other forms of injustice associated with it must be more clearly addressed, and those responsible held accountable.

Events of 2020 have made clearer than ever before that the restructuring required by the transition to a post-carbon economy also requires new visions of the labour and social relations of care, for both current and future generations. The rapid onset of the COVID-19



pandemic exposed the frailty of care systems in many societies, weakened in many cases by the neoliberal “retreat from social provisioning” discussed earlier. At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted once again how central gender inequalities are to care work, whether unpaid or low paid.

Efforts to redress gender inequalities in the care economy have long been an important focus of gender justice programming and policy-making. The recognition that men and boys can support progress toward both gender and economic justice by participating more actively and equitably in the work of ‘cooking, cleaning and caring’ has driven the significant expansion in fatherhood and/or parenting programming and policy advocacy in recent years, and the attention given to the care economy in gender justice work with men more generally. An orientation toward the individual as the site and agent of change continues to shape both programming and policy advocacy on men’s relationship to and responsibilities within care economies.

A broader institutional analysis of care economies makes clear that “[r]edistribution requires policies that ensure that the provision of care is shared more equitably among families, states, markets and the not-for-profit sector, as well as between women and men within families.”<sup>5</sup> If gender transformative work with men and boys is to embrace this institutional analysis, then it must take care not to be complicit with a public policy discourse on the care economy that centers attention on the family and men’s “irresponsible” masculinity. Perhaps a bigger challenge for gender transformative work with men and boys, seeking to work in solidarity with feminist visions of economic transformation for intersectional gender justice, is to envision relations of care for each other and for the planet that transcend the masculine-feminine binary separating production from social reproduction. It is this binary distinction between masculinized ‘work’ and feminized ‘care’ that must be overcome.

Soaring inequalities and climate crises are destroying lives and livelihoods. This raises the question of how gender transformative

5 UN Women. 2018. “Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” New York: UN Women. p224

work with men and boys can help them to see their own interests in the systems change agenda being advanced by feminists across the world. There are related questions about how to change the gender narrative tying masculinity to waged work and how to develop an intersectional class analysis of masculinities that can challenge politically regressive and reductive accounts of a 'crisis' in masculinity. There are questions too about how gender transformative work with men might be used to build the power of organized labor to advance a radical and linked agenda for both economic and gender justice, and how such work can support a broader agenda for the redistribution of care work, not just within families but across society as a whole. And more fundamentally, a vision of sustainable and equitable life-making, collective care and social solidarity beyond the patriarchal masculine-feminine binary is needed.

## Social Contexts: Anti-Feminism, Normalized Violence and Politicized Religion

Over the last decade or more, gender transformative work with men and boys has increasingly been framed as challenging and changing "harmful norms of masculinity". A critical task,

then, is to assess current trends in such norms, and how social attitudes on gender relations, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ issues are being shaped by the political and economic factors and forces discussed above. Research on electoral support for authoritarian, patriarchal political ideologies suggests that gender conservatism and attachment to authoritarian values, rather than economic circumstances and grievances, account most accurately for voters' increasing support for far-right parties in many countries. Studies suggesting that authoritarian, patriarchal political ideologies resonate particularly with men are now being complemented by research on women's growing involvement, as voters and activists, in far-right parties and organizations.

More generally, large-scale surveys of social attitudes indicate that support for progress on gender equality may be weakening. Furthermore, "[s]urveys have shown that younger men may be even less committed to equality than their elders."<sup>6</sup> This trend analysis is reinforced by recent data from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) examining men's gender attitudes more specifically. Surveys of attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ people and their rights suggest a mixed picture with respect to SOGIESC issues in the broader context of attitudes toward gender justice and sexual

6 UNDP. 2020. "Tackling Social Norms: A Game Changer for Gender Inequalities." 2020 Human Development Perspectives. New York: United Nations Development Programme. p9



rights. Recent research on the impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTQIA+ communities has found evidence of an increase in stigmatization, marginalization and violence, linked to long histories of LGBTQIA+ people being targeted for blame during emergency situations.

Further evidence for a trend toward increasing opposition to gender equality, especially among men, may be found in the growing visibility of organizations self-identifying as working on “men’s rights”. The increasing visibility of men’s rights activism appears to indicate a reaction both to the changing political economy of gender, by which growing numbers of women are entering waged work and displacing men’s breadwinner role in some cases, and to the hard-won feminist gains for women’s rights in many countries. The anti-feminism of men’s rights activism is often expressed in the language of male victimhood and vulnerability; a shared feeling of victimhood unites men’s rights activists not only within but between countries. Confronting the anti-feminist messaging of men’s rights organizations, and working with both men and boys to support them in rejecting such messaging, is clearly a priority. To do so, however, requires a clear understanding of the sophistication of both the emotional appeal and transnational organizing of men’s rights activism.

One of the most dangerous aspects of men’s rights movement messaging is its minimization of violence against women and girls, and the often related claim that violence against men and boys is of equivalent concern. Yet, as decades of research make clear, violence against women and girls is widespread and normalized to an extraordinary degree in many societies. It is this normalization of and impunity for men’s violence against women, girls and gender non-conforming people that the #MeToo movement has exposed once again. Men’s violence against women and girls is structured by patriarchal relations of power, which themselves are shaped by economic exploitation, racialized oppression, and other intersecting hierarchies of power. Such an analysis complicates the struggles for justice which feminists have waged for decades in confronting the pervasive violence that women and girls face. Indeed, “public security forces are some of the biggest perpetrators of violence against



women and other marginalised groups.”<sup>7</sup> For many women and girls, then, the State has become an agent of violence against them, rather than a source of justice for them.

This understanding of the systemic nature of gender-based violence makes clear that gender transformative work with men and boys must be about systems change, at institutional and ideological levels, as well as efforts to change individual men's attitudes and behaviors. It also highlights the limitations of a “social norms” framework, commonly applied in gender transformative work with men and boys, which addresses such norms as determinants of individual behavior rather than as expressions of systemic power relations. An understanding of the systemic nature of gender-based violence, structured by intersecting hierarchies of power, also directs attention to the very different experiences of and relationships to such violence which different groups of men have, based on their differing positions within these hierarchies. The patriarchal violence that maintains the systemic domination of women by men also maintains the cisgendered, heteronormative gender binary that structures gender relations in so many societies. Irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity, men and boys living and/or working in all-male environments can be subject to different forms of physical, psychological and sexual violence, whose function is to assert and maintain gender hierarchies amongst men and boys. A continuing challenge for the field of gender transformative work with men and boys on patriarchal masculinities is to respond to the ways in which the violence of such masculinities harms people of differing gender identities, without at the same time inadvertently reinforcing the messaging on male victimhood used by Men's Rights movements.

Gender transformative work with men and boys must also confront the political use of religious doctrine to assert and maintain patriarchal masculinities. The significance of religiosity in linking social conservatism with political authoritarianism, and the gender dimensions of such links, merits closer examination. Research suggests a trend of growing religiosity in many countries, although

7 Fraser, Erika. 2020. “Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Violence against Women and Girls.” VAWG Helpdesk Research Report No. 284. London, UK: Department for International Development. p4

such reports of the importance of religion do not necessarily suggest an increased commitment to either social conservatism or political authoritarianism. The meanings of religious teaching and practice vary greatly, not least with respect to gender roles and relations. But trends in religiosity should be understood in relation to the political agendas of organized religious groups, whose institutional arrangements and ideological commitments give them the character of social movements. Studies of ethnonationalist parties and forces in many parts of the world highlight their use of religion in connecting male supremacy with white/majority supremacist ideologies. That the authoritarian political turn in many countries is drawing on a religiously-grounded patriarchal social conservatism is clear and threatens a broad progressive agenda.

As this forgoing overview of social contexts suggests, any work to challenge the normalization of patriarchal social relations, and the gender-based violence associated with them, must analyze trends in “harmful gender norms” in the context of a resurgent social conservatism, often religiously informed, which is itself harnessed by specific political forces in particular economic conditions. Organizations doing gender transformative work with men and boys must also speak out more publicly against the increase in misogynistic public speech. So too is it urgent to develop contextually-specific analyses of and responses to Men’s Rights narratives

and groups, both at the level of media communications and public messaging, and in terms of working directly with men and boys to support them in rejecting Men’s Rights propaganda. As a community of practice for such work, MenEngage Alliance has an important role to play to generate and share lessons and tools that can enhance such responses to Men’s Rights organizing. Part of this work will also involve continuing to build relationships and dialog with religious groups and leaders, to enlist their support in countering misogyny and patriarchal masculinities.

## Digital Contexts: Media, Attention Economies and the Manosphere

The political, economic and social contexts discussed above have all been shaped by, and in turn shaped, the pace and nature of technological change, especially in relation to digital communications and spaces. Anti-patriarchal work with men and boys has long had an interest in the role of media and communication technologies in maintaining patriarchal norms, and especially its role in socializing young men into patriarchal masculinities. Much of this work has focused on issues of media literacy in relation to the objectification of women and girls across many forms of media (from TV shows, to music lyrics, to advertising campaigns), and the role played by representations of violence

(in movies, TV and computer gaming) in desensitizing boys and young men to patriarchal violence. More recently, gender justice advocates have highlighted the impact of digital technologies in deepening the marginalization of women, girls and LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities.

As a medium of both interpersonal communication and public discourse, the internet both reinforces and expands the operations of oppressive behaviors and hierarchies. A growing body of evidence shows that the impacts of digital misogyny and online violence are limiting women's and girls' participation in public and political life. A 2018 report by OHCHR emphasizes that women and girls "face online forms and manifestations of violence that are part of the continuum of multiple, recurring and interrelated forms of gender-based violence against women."<sup>8</sup> Not only do digital misogyny and online violence have political effects; they serve specific political purposes and interests. Recognizing that digital technologies facilitate not merely interpersonal communication but political speech and action means that the political forces at work on the internet must be acknowledged.

Together with this important emphasis on the ways in which an ideological commitment to misogyny and male

supremacy is manifested online, it is also important to understand the logic of exploitation and oppression organizing the operations of digital platforms themselves. There is a growing recognition that the ownership structures and network effects of "platform capitalism" concentrate power in unprecedented ways. At best, this concentration of power results in a new paternalism. At worst, the very possibility of rational public debate and decision-making is undermined by manipulation and exploitation of communication infrastructures, and the increasingly hidden nature of decision-making by automated systems and their algorithms. Where communication technologies used to be understood in terms of their capacity to create and share meaning, the digital communications of platform capitalism are fundamentally not about the articulation of meaning, but keeping people's attention in order to extract and exploit their data. The proliferation of conspiracy memes and conspiracist thinking online is the product of this commercial logic and the crisis of democratic decision-making and accountability it has helped to fuel.

The patriarchal masculinities of the manosphere have thrived in this digital media environment; the term "manosphere" refers to the online ecology of sites, memes and message-boards

8 OHCHR. 2018. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences on Online Violence against Women and Girls from a Human Rights Perspective." Human Rights Council Thirty-eighth session, 18 June–6 July 2018. Agenda item 3: Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. Geneva, Switzerland: UN Human Rights Council. p5

focused on male insecurities and resentments whose content is frequently deeply misogynistic. The manosphere is constructed around a narrative of feminism's oppression of men, and a rejection of the evidence of men's patriarchal oppression of women. The manosphere has helped to foster a transnational ecology of aggrieved male entitlement and virulent misogyny, so central to the Men's Rights activism discussed in the previous section. One result of this is the growing number of young men who identify online as incels (involuntary celibates). Central to incel ideology are misogynistic notions of gender roles and shared beliefs about heterosexuality, male supremacy and the need to violently reestablish 'traditional' gender norms. Online communities, meeting on message boards and in other internet venues, validate this misogynistic world view and encourage direct action in pursuit of their goals.

The misogynistic anger and conspiracy thinking that proliferate online, reinforced as they are by the commercial logic of platform capitalism, pose significant threats to the work of gender justice movements. At the same time, it is also true that digital technologies have opened up unprecedented opportunities for transnational activism and social justice movement building, needed now more than ever in the midst of the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The growing influence of media and online space on all aspects of everyday life and political debate, including expressions and experiences of patriarchal masculinities, means that the feminist systems change agenda is necessarily concerned with gender transformative work on media and online systems. Thinking through the ways in which gender transformative work with men and boys can contribute to this agenda is an urgent priority. In participating in online organizing to call for a radical overhaul of platform capitalism and mechanisms of State surveillance of civil society, those working to engage men and boys in gender equality should also pay greater attention to security and safety issues within their digital communications and activism.

## Operational Contexts: Rationale, Accountability and Social Change

The expansion of programming which self-identifies as “engaging” men and boys in work for gender justice has been significant over the last two and half decades. What unites this disparate body of work and its diverse components as a “field” is the fundamental goal of dismantling patriarchal systems by working with men and boys to transform patriarchal masculinities, operating at individual, institutional and ideological levels. But there remain long-standing tensions within gender transformative work with men and boys relating to the guiding rationale for the field itself. Do we work with men and boys to challenge patriarchal systems for the sake of those most oppressed by gender injustices (i.e. cisgendered, heterosexual women, girls and LGBTQIA+ communities) or should this work also be concerned with the harms men and boys suffer from patriarchal masculinities?

The emphasis in recent years on men’s roles and responsibilities “as stakeholders and co-beneficiaries in advancing gender-

equality”<sup>9</sup> is being called into question, with concerns about what this emphasis means in practice for how the field of gender transformative work with men and boys operates, and understands its relationship and responsibilities to broader gender justice movements. The Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM) warns of “a parallel system” emerging, of “male engagement campaigns, programmes, organisations and networks that, although allied theoretically to feminist principles, stand largely independent of the women’s movement.”<sup>10</sup>

Key to this work is a teasing out of the personal and organizational aspects of accountability, in terms of both practices and mechanisms. As already noted, there has been a move within the “men for gender justice” field to the use of languages of “co-beneficiary” and “stakeholder” over that of ally, in order to emphasize the benefits to men and boys themselves of their anti-patriarchal work. But the extent to which this preference signals a dilution of commitment to the principle that those most affected by patriarchal oppression must be in the leadership of movements to address it remains a question of live debate. Building gender equality coalitions led by those most affected by gender injustice (including people with non-normative

9 Ricardo, Christine. 2014. “Men, Masculinities, and Changing Power: A Discussion Paper on Engaging Men in Gender Equality from Beijing 1995 to 2015.” MenEngage Alliance and UN Women. p24

10 COFEM. 2017. “How a Lack of Accountability Undermines Work to Address Violence against Women and Girls.” Feminist Perspectives on Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls Paper No. 1. Coalition of Feminists for Social Change. p5

gender identities and expressions and sexual orientations) requires a practice of accountability informed by shared analyses of gender injustice. The implication of the above is that to make progress on these issues of accountability and solidarity, there is a need not only to strengthen individual and organizational practices of accountability, but also to develop a shared understanding across the Alliance's membership and others of the transformative systems change feminist agenda to which we hold ourselves accountable.

To do so, however, will require that those doing this work, including ourselves as MenEngage Alliance, address the ways in which the field of gender transformative work with men and boys itself fosters a focus on the personal aspects of "working with men and boys" to the relative neglect of strategies to transform patriarchal structures. This will require that the field of gender transformative work with men and boys reflect more intentionally and intensively on the ways in which some of the key concepts that have driven and shaped the emergence of the field have limited its capacity to develop both structural understandings of and strategies for gender justice. This includes the category of "men and boys" itself, whose unwitting homogenization of the diversity of men and boys has tended to understate the degree to which men's experiences and expressions of patriarchal masculinities are profoundly shaped by their positioning within hierarchies of power, structured not only by gender, but also by class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age and citizenship/nationality. Equally, the framing of gender transformative strategies with men and boys in terms of transforming "harmful norms of masculinities" has tended to privilege social psychological accounts of harmful behavior over structural analyses of male supremacy, in its interactions with other forces of oppression. That the dominant social norms paradigm has a tendency to de-politicize gender transformative work has been discussed above. Re-politicizing such work requires a recognition that structural interventions and social change strategies concerned with the distribution and exercise of social, economic and political power must necessarily be intersectional in their analysis, and focused on not merely individual but also institutional and ideological change.

This in turn directs attention to the colonial histories and neocolonial realities in which gender transformative work with men and boys


is situated. Taking MenEngage Alliance as an example: As a global social change network, MenEngage operates within a global architecture of aid and development, which is rooted in these colonial histories. That this architecture is neocolonial in its structuring of power relations between “Global North” and “Global South” has long been recognized, though is increasingly more openly discussed within the aid sector itself. With regional networks spanning the South and North, MenEngage Alliance is conscious to recognize that the Alliance’s own internal structures and processes may serve to perpetuate neocolonial paternalism between global North and South, and unwittingly reinforce the racism and power-dynamics discussed above.

If a necessary commitment to decolonizing these practices requires self-reflection on internal processes and structures, it also calls for greater self-awareness about the systems of knowledge production on which the field of gender transformative work with men and boys has been built. Much of the knowledge informing gender transformative work with men and boys is produced by an “economy of knowledge” that privileges neocolonial perspectives. An important component of decolonizing our practice then as the field is to contribute to the production and sharing of knowledge about masculinities that takes full account of the colonial histories and neocolonial dynamics referred to above. One aspiration of the Ubuntu Symposium is to think and act in ways that support this decolonized practice.

## Ways Forward

The context analyses presented above make clear the scale and severity of the challenges facing gender justice movements. Not only must our work move beyond its current emphasis on individual-level change to address the institutional and ideological structuring of male power, privileges and supremacy, but it must do so in ways that strengthen rather than undermine gender justice movement-building, and that take leadership from and be accountable to those most targeted by gender injustice, namely women, girls and LGBTQIA+ communities. To meet these challenges, collectively and effectively, we must recognize that this work must be aligned





around a set of shared commitments to: human rights, feminist principles and vision, intersectional gender justice, decolonization and anti-racism, and solidarity and accountability.

MenEngage Alliance and our members work with many different communities and constituencies including people of all genders and sexualities, but share a common interest in supporting those who are privileged by patriarchal systems to be agents of change in transforming these systems. To do so, it is becoming clear that one must take more account of the heterogeneity of the category “men and boys” and that patriarchal power and privileges are shaped by many other forces and factors of marginalization and oppression. This intersectional approach also directs attention to the men who benefit most from patriarchal systems. Developing strategies to demand change from the men at the top of gender and related hierarchies should remain as key priority.

In partnering with and taking leadership from movements of those most targeted by gender injustice and patriarchal systems, it is their collective analyses and assumptions about how best to dismantle such systems that must guide the gender transformative work with men and boys. Three broad areas of work are emerging as being constitutive of the gender transformative contribution that work with men as agents of change in transforming patriarchal masculinities can make to

the broader struggles for gender justice being led by feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements, namely: programming with men and boys for personal change and social action; support to policy and political advocacy by women’s rights and LGBTQIA+ movements; and gender justice movement building with women’s rights and LGBTQIA+ organizations.

The forgoing context analyses suggest the need for work across a continuum of gender transformative change, highlighting the importance of linking personal change strategies with social change strategies to challenge the institutional and ideological operations of patriarchal systems. There are calls for more evidence on which to base the funding for qualitative, over quantity, gender transformative work with men and boys, but these calls must confront the reality that current approaches to project funding and evaluation favor the small-scale behaviorally-focused interventions which the field of gender equality work with men and boys has been urged to expand beyond. Different ways to assess impact across the continuum of gender transformative change are needed in order to develop a more politically-informed, structurally-minded evidence base.

At the same time, this emphasis on working to transform patriarchal masculinities across a continuum of change, from the individual to the institutional to the ideological and systemic levels, highlights the priority



of movement building over field development. Far from developing a separate field of gender equality work with men and boys, the challenge for this field is to develop the analyses, skills and partnerships to enable those doing the work to make meaningful and accountable contributions to such collective action for gender justice. The urgency of doing so has never been greater. Political and economic structures, indeed the ecosystem of the planet, are in crisis, with the spread and impacts of COVID-19 being both the latest manifestation of such crises and a warning of what is to come unless radical change is undertaken. In many ways, such crises constitute a crisis of hegemony for political and economic elites. One of the clearest signs of the current vacuum of liberal hegemony is the rise of 'strongman' authoritarianism and the appeals to the social conservatism of a patriarchal gender order discussed above. This is to say that patriarchal ideas and ideals of masculinities are being renewed in response to the multiple crises (economic, ecological and now epidemiological) with which we are beset. People of all gender identities, men included, have an existential stake in the feminist vision of a world whose wealth and natural resources are shared by all, where equality and freedom are premises, not aspirations. Our task is to help ensure that this stake becomes the basis for political action by men and boys in support of this radical feminist vision. ■



The background of the slide features a large, abstract graphic. It consists of several overlapping, wavy, horizontal bands in shades of blue and white, creating a sense of movement and depth. The top half of the slide is a solid light blue, while the bottom half is a solid dark blue. The wavy lines are positioned in the upper right quadrant, extending from the top right towards the center.

# **Introduction**

**It is the year 2020. This year was always going to be significant.**

It is 25 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women and its adoption of the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It is 20 years since UN Security Council Resolution 1325 established the Women, Peace and Security agenda. 2020 also marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations itself, the fifth anniversary of the Paris Climate Agreement and a five year milestone in progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. For all of those who are committed to the visions of gender equality, human rights and social justice expressed in these international declarations and agreements, 2020 was to have been a year of taking stock of progress made and debating priorities and strategies to advance towards these visions.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has derailed such plans. The pandemic is affecting billions of peoples lives worldwide, and exposing the fragility of public health systems and of the mechanisms of international cooperation itself. More fundamentally, COVID-19 is laying bare the fault-lines of profound injustice and inequality, which determine who suffers and who prospers. Our understanding of the basis for “functioning societies: proved to be misguided and unjust. The gender dimensions of these fault-lines of injustice and inequality are well documented. The COVID-related crises of public health, economic recession and governance failures signal a critical juncture. They are threatening any progress that has been made toward gender equality, human rights and social justice. Such crises have been long in the making. For those who are involved in gender transformative work with men and boys, including MenEngage Alliance members and partners, the challenge involves accepting responsibility for figuring out the complex ways and extent to which patriarchal masculinities are at the root of the situation. Feminist activists, meeting in Mexico City from across the world in August 2019 to prepare for the Beijing+25 Generation Equality Forums being planned for 2020, were unequivocal in their analysis:

*Neoliberal capitalism is a key driver of current global crises. [...] As we understand patriarchal structures and white supremacy to be central to the current functioning of neoliberal capitalism—evident in the mountain of unpaid care work on which corporate profits rest—the*

*market cannot be an effective mechanism through which to correct gender, racial, or ethnic inequality. Instead, active policy interventions that seek to restructure the current, unequal state of the economy and society are fundamental to a feminist approach.*

As they insisted, “[w]omen have long been at the forefront of struggles against this system, understanding it to be fundamentally incompatible with the liberation and empowerment of women, and transgender and gender non-conforming people.” In recent years, such struggles have intensified, with women in the leadership of political organizing and street protest on structural issues that impede gender justice, such as economic and environmental injustices, militarization and conflict. An energized youth movement, again often led by young women, continues to call for a radical response to the climate crisis and racial injustices, and full recognition of bodily autonomy. The #MeToo and #NiUnaMas movements have brought renewed militancy to campaigns against men’s pervasive use of violence against women and girls. It was three women of color who started the #BlackLivesMatter movement to confront ongoing white supremacy in the USA, and the State violence that maintains it.

How can organizations working with men and boys to transform patriarchal masculinities support and contribute to such feminist demands to “restructure

the current, unequal state of the economy and society”? This is the question that confronts the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium. Planned to coincide with the anniversaries noted above, and to reflect on the decade or more of work since the 1st MenEngage Global Symposium, the Ubuntu Symposium itself has been redesigned as a virtual process in response to the realities of COVID-19. As the symposium Concept Note affirms, the “impetus for work on men and masculinities is more urgent than ever” but “action without critical reflection often has a counter-productive impact.” This became even more important as the reason for MenEngage Alliance’s formation and maturation revolves around ensuring effective and sustainable ways to ‘engage’ men and boys in efforts to dismantle patriarchal systems and to promote gender justice. This paper intends to stimulate and leap in responding to the question above, by building on to the base of promising practices and evidence from our members, partners and in support of the premise that patriarchal masculinities can be transformed.

This Discussion Paper is intended as a stimulus and support to the critical reflection and collective discussions at the Ubuntu Symposium and beyond. The paper builds on the analyses of systemic gender injustice advanced by feminist and LGBTQIA+ social movements. It examines the complex ways in which patriarchal masculinities, as expressed in personal behavior, institutional practice

and ideological discourse, produce and are produced by this injustice. In doing so, the paper seeks to encourage discussions and develop collective understanding of the political, economic and socio-cultural forces confronting the world today, shaping the contexts in which our work on transforming patriarchal masculinities and engaging men and boys for gender and social justice takes place. In the context analyses that follow, these forces are briefly sketched, and their potential implications for the work of the Alliance discussed. The Ubuntu Symposium is a timely opportunity to collectively reflect on some of the major challenges facing today's field of gender equality and social justice.

Calls to politicize gender equality work with men and boys have been made repeatedly since the first MenEngage Global Symposium in 2009. The deepening crisis of injustice and inequalities the world now faces make these calls more urgent than ever. This Discussion Paper seeks to spark critical reflection, based on the historical and contemporary trends in the field, about what these crises mean for the work that are needed to transform patriarchal masculinities, most importantly through generating, integrating and disseminating grounded local knowledge and priorities. We do not claim to have all the answers, but we do want to raise questions about how best we can contribute to ending patriarchal power, protecting human rights and achieving gender equality and social justice. Rather,

what the paper also seeks to do is present the need for the work on transforming masculinities and engaging men and boys to be further sharpened and politicized, including through local ownership of programs, networking and partnership building, advocacy, and communications, keeping the Alliance's mission and vision in mind. These are questions not only about how to challenge the systemic nature of patriarchal masculinities, but also how these systems live in and through us, affecting our abilities to contribute to the movements for gender justice to whom we are accountable. As we re-commit to that purpose, we are grateful to our members who have long been leading this work at country, regional and international levels, and we will continue to build on their work to strengthen the impact of this work. We come together at the Ubuntu Symposium to explore and debate these questions; please join us. ■





01

# Gender Justice

The Need for  
Systemic Change

## 1.1 Patriarchal resistance to progress on gender justice

In the 25 years since the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, an unprecedented mobilization across feminist civil society, national governments and multi-lateral institutions has ensured that the injustices of gender inequalities have become a central focus of work on human rights and sustainable development. Yet, feminist activists from social movements across the world continue to highlight the extent to which progress made since the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action is threatened, and in some cases reversed. Indeed, as Brazilian feminist activist and researcher Sonia Corrêa points out, patriarchal resistance to the Platform for Action began before the Beijing conference itself:<sup>11</sup>

*The first attack on gender occurred in the context of the preparations for the Beijing Conference, when gender was attacked by religious conservative civil society organizations from the U.S., both Catholic and Evangelical. In the official negotiations, the Holy See asked for the*

*term to be placed in square brackets to indicate that there was no consensus.*

These forces of patriarchal resistance were highlighted at the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium in 2014. As the background paper prepared for the symposium observed:<sup>12</sup>

*[C]onservative discourses, state-supported in some countries, of a hyper-masculine national identity promote traditional patriarchal roles as a project of nation-building, thereby dangerously conflating patriarchy, patriotism, culture and national sovereignty into a political discourse and positioning progress toward women's empowerment and gender equality as disruptive of a national order.*

At a 2019 feminist convening in Mexico City to prepare for the Beijing+25 Generation Equality Forum, this threat of resurgent patriarchy was made clear. Participants at the convening agreed that while progress has been made in the twenty-five years since the Beijing conference, “we have also witnessed backlash against those gains and the consolidation of power imbalances and structures underlying women's oppression, with dire results.”<sup>13</sup> While there are debates about the use of the term “backlash” to

11 Corrêa, Sonia. 2020. “Interview: The Anti-Gender Offensive as State Policy.” Retrieved: September 25, 2020 (<https://www.conectas.org/en/news/interview-the-anti-gender-offensive-as-state-policy>).

12 Ricardo, Christine. 2014. “Men, Masculinities, and Changing Power: A Discussion Paper on Engaging Men in Gender Equality from Beijing 1995 to 2015.” MenEngage Alliance, and UN Women and UNFPA. p45

13 Anon. 2019. “Women Radically Transforming a World in Crisis: A Framework for Beijing+25 Shaped at a Strategy Meeting of Feminist Activists.” Mexico City, Mexico. p1

characterize the trends in and dynamics of anti-feminist mobilizations, it is clear that such mobilizations have both a long history and contemporary significance.<sup>14</sup>

The forces ranged against progressive



**This naming of the structural obstacles to realizing gender justice and women's human rights is essential. Only with this clarity can the political opportunity be seized to develop and implement a radical agenda for fundamental changes in these interlocking "systems of oppression"**

efforts to address gender injustice are formidable. Feminist activists at the Mexico City convening identified a "nexus of religious groups, political elites, the private sector, entrepreneurs, religious educational institutions, movements, militants, and other diverse actors using religious idiom to advance anti-democratic, misogynist political agendas." This nexus is "increasingly

dominating the public narrative and decision-making spaces, providing both monetary and intellectual resources across borders for the advancement of their shared agenda."<sup>15</sup> The Women's Rights Caucus, a global coalition of over 200 organizations working to advance women's human rights, in their Feminist declaration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, similarly expresses "grave concern at the rise of authoritarianism, fascism, nationalism, xenophobia, supremacist ideologies, and fundamentalism worldwide." In particular, the Women's Rights Caucus emphasizes that the "neoliberal economic order is a key structural barrier that since 1995 has exacerbated inequalities within and between countries and among genders." The declaration makes clear:<sup>16</sup>

*That patriarchy and other systems of oppression reinforce this economic system, which has allowed a small number of wealthy individuals to gain more power, has compromised democratic systems of governance worldwide and allowed authoritarian, fascist and populist figures to thrive.*

This naming of the structural obstacles to realizing gender justice and women's human rights is essential. Only with

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the concept of patriarchal backlash, and its potential limitations (conceptual, empirical and political) see <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2020/03/30/backlash-a-misleading-narrative/>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p1

<sup>16</sup> Women's Rights Caucus. 2019. p1



this clarity can the political opportunity be seized to develop and implement a radical agenda for fundamental changes in these interlocking “systems of oppression”. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the urgency of this radical feminist agenda, even as the opportunity for progressive change appears threatened by the scale and severity of the public health emergency, and its derailing of political priorities. Maintaining momentum for pushing forwards the feminist visions of radical systems change outlined by the Women’s Rights Caucus and the Mexico City convening will not be easy in the midst of COVID-19. Its devastating economic impacts will weaken the ability of national governments and intergovernmental bodies to make the necessary financial investments to transition to an equitable and sustainable economic order, that prioritizes the needs of people and the planet over the power and profits of transnational corporations and elites. The inability of multilateral institutions and processes to coordinate an effective global response to the pandemic is already evident, as is the marginalization of civil society within pandemic response decision-making, from the national to the international level.

The forces threatening progress on women’s human rights and gender justice more broadly are, in many ways, being intensified by COVID-19 and reactions to it: a rise in xenophobic nationalism, the repression of political dissent, the undermining of multi-lateral institutions and an ever-greater concentration of power in the hands of wealthy elites and the world’s richest corporations. At the level of the household, the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated patriarchal dynamics, with a documented surge in cases of men’s violence against women, children and gender non-conforming people, and an increase in the burden of care work borne by women and girls.<sup>17</sup>

Given this, it is easy to lose sight of the progress that has been made by feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements, on which struggles for gender justice must continue to build. The Women’s Rights Caucus reminds that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been a

17 UN Women. 2020. “COVID-19 and Ending Violence against Women and Girls.” New York, NY: UN Women.



“crucial tool for feminist movements to drive transformative change, from creating gender machinery, to changing discriminatory laws and policies, building political will and accountability frameworks, and to shifting global conversations.”<sup>18</sup> But the Caucus is also clear that this incremental reform over the last 25 years must not be held back by “lack of courageous actions”; indeed, a transformative step forwards in both organizing and legislating for gender justice is required in the face of “actions of regressive groups who reinforce patriarchy, nationalism, fundamentalism, authoritarianism, and capitalism.”<sup>19</sup> In the words of the Mexico City feminist convening, “we seek a radical transformation of a world in crisis, putting women, people, and the planet over profit.”<sup>20</sup>

Feminist movements continue to lead this radical transformation. From youth climate activism, to MeToo/Ni Una Menos protests, to the Black Lives Matter movement, women and girls of all ages have been in the leadership of political energies ‘from below’, expressing a profound intersectional feminist challenge to the failed status quo. As commentators have noted recently, the feminist-strike movement, which began in Poland in October 2016, when over a hundred thousand women staged walkouts and marches to oppose that country’s ban on abortion, has been central to this challenge. As Arruzza et al., authors of the book *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* made clear in 2018:<sup>21</sup>

*For the last two years, its slogans have resonated around the globe: Nosotras Paramos, We Strike, Vivas Nos Queremos, Ni Una Menos, Feminism for the 99 percent. At first a ripple, then a wave, it has*

18 Women’s Rights Caucus. 2019. para 7. The declaration highlights the progress that has been made in the “recognition of gender-based violence as a matter of national and international importance”, the passage of laws in more than fifty countries increasing access to abortion, the adoption of ILO Conventions on the rights of Domestic Workers and Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, the reform of laws that have increased women’s and girls’ access, ownership, use and control of land and natural resources, and the passage of laws recognizing same-sex relationships, the enactment of legal gender recognition laws based on self-determination, and the decriminalization of same-sex intimacy in some countries.”

19 Ibid. para 36

20 Anon. 2019. p2

21 Arruzza, Cinzia, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser. 2018. “Notes for a Feminist Manifesto.” *New Left Review* 114 (November-December): 113-34. p115

*become a global phenomenon.*

Crucially, this intersectional feminist activism has focused on the relationships and infrastructures of collective care and social solidarity, whose undermining by neoliberal political economy the COVID-19 pandemic has so clearly exposed:<sup>22</sup>

*Resistance against neoliberalism has shifted to other arenas: healthcare, education, pensions, housing—the labour and services necessary to reproduce human beings and social communities. From the strike wave of US teachers to the struggle against water privatization in Ireland and the protests of Dalit sanitation workers in India, it is here that we find the most militant fightbacks—led and powered by women.*

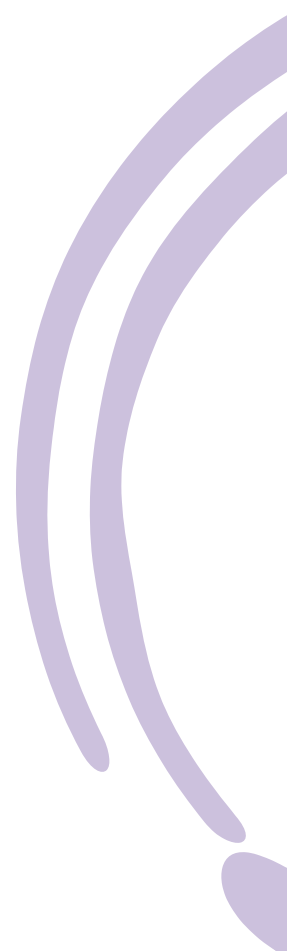
Intergovernmental processes such as the UN-sponsored Generation Equality Forums, the UN Climate Change Conferences, the Agenda 2030 and SDG framework, Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW process all provide an architecture within which to give voice and visibility to demands for political transformation. But the pressure for such transformation must still be maintained. For many years, such intergovernmental processes and spaces have also been sites for patriarchal backlash, a backlash which in recent years has been intensifying. As scholars have recently noted, “[a]ntifeminist mobilisation is growing in the United Nations”, uniting a diverse range of forces across the Global North and South around “the aim of restoring the ‘natural family’ and opposing ‘gender ideology’.”<sup>23</sup> The need to counter such regressive “family values” and the anti-feminist politics they support is pressing; Cupač and Ebetürk warn that we are “looking at a group with the potential to alter not only the global course of women’s rights but also how politics is done within the UN.”<sup>24</sup>

In response, both inside and outside of formal political structures

22 Ibid. p116

23 Cupač, Jelena and Irem Ebetürk. 2020. “The Personal Is Global Political: The Antifeminist Backlash in the United Nations.” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 22(4):1-13. p1

24 Ibid. p1





**In response, both inside and outside of formal political structures and processes, feminist movements are organizing around a transformative vision of gender justice, grounded in commitments to social justice, human security, and economic and political transformation**

and processes, feminist movements are organizing around a transformative vision of gender justice, grounded in commitments to social justice, human security, and economic and political transformation. Increasingly, as Arruzza et al. note, this feminist resistance is joining “forces with other anti-capitalist movements across the globe—with environmentalist, anti-racist, anti-imperialist and LGBTQ+ movements and labour unions, and above all with their anti-capitalist currents.”<sup>25</sup> The closing statement of the Women’s Rights Caucus Feminist Declaration, states unequivocally that “we remind governments that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action belongs to our movements” and that “we reject the actions of regressive groups who reinforce patriarchy, nationalism, fundamentalism, authoritarianism, and capitalism.” The Women’s Rights Caucus is also clear that this agenda for radical transformation involves recognizing “the importance of transforming patriarchal masculinities and dismantling stereotypical social norms for the elimination of gender-based violence and discrimination” and committing “to the full engagement of men and boys for the achievement of gender equality, and to have them take responsibility and be held accountable for their behavior by understanding and addressing the root causes of gender inequality [...]”<sup>26</sup> Given this, the question facing organizations and networks concerned with working with men and boys to challenge patriarchal masculinities is how best to connect with, support and act in solidarity with this upsurge in intersectional feminist movement organizing, both on the streets and in the halls of power.

## 1.2 Gender justice work with men and boys

That progress toward women’s rights and gender justice would be enhanced by specific efforts to work with men and boys was highlighted in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action itself. This international commitment has been built on more than two decades

25 Ibid. p133

26 Women’s Rights Caucus. 2019. para 34

of work by women's rights organizations with men and boys on issues such as domestic violence, parenting and care



**Over time, this language has become more nuanced, moving from calls to simply “engage” men and boys to more specific statements about the roles and responsibilities of men and boys within policy agendas on issues such as gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and Women, Peace and Security**

work, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. One of the incremental changes over the last 25 years that has accompanied and contributed to the progress described above has been the growth of gender justice work targeting men and boys.

In global policy-making spaces, there has been a steady uptake of language on engaging men and boys towards

advancing all women's and girls' human rights and fundamental freedoms. Over time, this language has become more nuanced, moving from calls to simply “engage” men and boys to more specific statements about the roles and responsibilities of men and boys within policy agendas on issues such as gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and Women, Peace and Security. The CEDAW Convention and General Recommendations emphasize the need to address the root causes of gender inequalities, including references to the needs to engage men and boys in gender equality more broadly.<sup>27</sup> The UN Human Rights Council promotes the engagement of men and boys as allies in a range of key issues related to gender equality, including SRHR, unpaid care work and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.<sup>28</sup> The Agreed Conclusions of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) have, on several occasions, highlighted the importance of gender transformative work with men and boys, notably at CSW48 in 2004, whose theme included the “role of men and boys in achieving gender equality”.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, UN Security Council Resolutions on the

27 UN General Assembly, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 18 December 1979, United Nations

28 UN Human Rights Council Resolution 35/10, Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls, June 2017

29 In addition: CSW58 addressed the roles of men and boys in sharing household responsibilities and taking equal responsibility in matters of sexuality and reproduction as well as HIV/AIDS prevention; CSW60 highlighted the benefits of a more equal society for men, women and children and emphasized the need to engage men in caregiving and domestic

Women, Peace and Security agenda have emphasized the need to address the militarized masculinities that help fuel both conflict and military spending, and to target work with men and boys on issues such as disarmament and demobilization and their own experiences of conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>30</sup>

With reference to these policy statements on gender equality work with men and boys, MenEngage Alliance worked in close collaboration and solidarity with feminist advocates and women's rights organizations to emphasize that initiatives to engage men and boys are done in an accountable manner, and in support of gender justice work with women and girls and LGBTQIA+ communities. At the same time, MenEngage Alliance provided a platform for member organizations to share with and learn from each other in improving their work with men and boys on issues such as SRHR, fatherhood and GBV prevention. In support of this Community of Practice among members, MenEngage Alliance developed a range of technical resources, as well as Accountability Standards and Guidelines and an Accountability Training Toolkit, which guide efforts across the membership towards full accountability in programmatic, advocacy and partnership efforts with women's rights organizations.<sup>31</sup>

In recent years, evaluations and evidence reviews of gender justice work with men and boys have highlighted both its potential for gender transformative impact and its current limitations. One of the largest of such reviews, the Engendering Men: Evidence on Routes to Gender Equality (EMERGE) project, concluded that:<sup>32</sup>

*Strategies with men and boys shown to be effective at the individual and community level in changing gender attitudes and behaviors*

work, and to transform social norms that condone violence.

30 Duriesmith, David. 2017. "Engaging Men and Boys in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Beyond the "Good Men" Industry." LSE Women, Peace and Security Working Paper Series. London: London School of Economics.

31 See <http://menengage.org/accountability/>

32 Edström, Jerker, Alexa Hassink, Thea Shahrokhi and Erin Stern. 2015. "Engendering Men: A Collaborative Review of Evidence on Men and Boys in Social Change and Gender Equality." EMERGE Evidence Review. Promundo-US, Sonke Gender Justice and the Institute of Development Studies. p18

*include a combination of peer education, using male advocates, large-scale media programs, workplace programs and community/ rights-based programming that aim to reduce gender inequality by working to change social norms.*

This emphasis on “changing gender attitudes and behaviors” has, however, been critiqued by many both within and outside the field of gender justice work with men and boys as paying insufficient attention to strategies for the kinds of systemic changes discussed earlier. More details of this critique are discussed in Section 6. For now, it is important to note that this concern about a lack of focus on structural barriers to gender justice is linked to a concern that work with men and boys, as it has expanded over the last 25 years, has too often been too separate from gender justice work with women and girls and LGBTQIA+ communities. This concern focuses on the implications of such a separation for the ability of gender justice work with men and boys to mobilize them as effective male allies to work in solidarity with feminist and social justice movements to dismantle patriarchal and other systems of power. In its insistence on the need for “transforming patriarchal masculinities”, the Women’s Rights Caucus echoes this concern. It makes clear the need to ensure that “all efforts to transform masculinities and engage men and boys are firmly rooted in feminist-informed, gender-transformative and human rights-based approaches that are fully accountable to feminist, women’s rights, activists, organizations and movements.”<sup>33</sup>

### 1.3

## Understanding gender transformative work on patriarchal masculinities

What it means to do “feminist-informed, gender-transformative” work with men and boys remains the key question facing the members of MenEngage Alliance and constituent networks. MenEngage’s 2018 submission to the CEDAW Committee on Engaging Men and Boys and Transforming Masculinities for the Realization of CEDAW’s Mandates, noted many of the concerns surrounding this field of work.



**This emphasis on “changing gender attitudes and behaviors” has, however, been critiqued by many both within and outside the field of gender justice work with men and boys as paying insufficient attention to strategies for the kinds of systemic changes discussed earlier**

33 Women’s Rights Caucus. 2019. para 34



These included the use of approaches that reinforce male domination; emphasis on men as victims of patriarchy; insufficient recognition of women's rights movements' work; unbalanced attention, visibility and access of those actively working with men and boys; competition for limited resources; and inequalities between small- and large-scale organizing and activities.<sup>34</sup>

The Evaluation of MenEngage's 2017-2020 Strategic Plan makes clear the extent to which the work of the Alliance over the last four years has addressed these concerns. In addition to the work on accountability issues already mentioned, the Alliance has worked with its membership to develop a shared understanding that:<sup>35</sup>

*Gender transformative approaches with men and boys are those that go beyond merely 'engaging men and boys' or educating or raising awareness of men and boys on a particular issue, and seek to create a fundamental shift in attitudes and behaviors related to masculinity and what it means to be a man within a particular society or context.*

In the Theory of Change of MenEngage Alliance, developed in 2018, the Alliance structured the analysis of gender transformative approaches using the

socio-ecological model of change. This model emphasizes the need to work not only at the individual and community levels, but also with "interventions that aim to embed positive gender norms into institutions; and through the promotion



**Yet, even two years later, this framework for gender transformative work with men and boys on patriarchal masculinities appears in need of updating**

of government policies and laws that engage men and boys in violence prevention and response."<sup>36</sup> In turn, the emphasis on accountability within the Theory of Change extends beyond holding individual men to account for their patriarchal behavior, to include holding to account institutions and systems across all sectors, national governments and the international community for their respective roles and responsibilities in transforming patriarchal masculinities.

Yet, even two years later, this framework for gender transformative work with men and boys on patriarchal masculinities appears in need of updating. The socio-

34 MenEngage. 2018. "Briefing Note: Engaging Men and Boys and Transforming Masculinities for the Realization of Cedaw's Mandates." Washington, DC: MenEngage Alliance Global Secretariat.

35 Ibid. p15

36 Ibid, p15



ecological model of change, as mostly in this field have used and still use, with its discreet levels and understanding of society in primarily national terms, struggles to account for the transnational, intersectional forces of oppression identified by feminist movements as the primary target of change. These forces are not confined to the 'nation'; they are shaped by histories of imperialism and colonialism and realities of neocolonial relations between the global North and South, structured as they are by neoliberal capitalism and contemporary geopolitics. The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) makes clear that:<sup>37</sup>

*It is the interests and needs of dominant groups (notably heterosexual, able-bodied and educated white men) that inform and drive our current world order. Long and complex histories of colonisation, interacting with dominant group interests in national contexts, exacerbate how decisions in the Global North impact the Global South.*

The Women's Major Group, which facilitates feminist and LGBTQIA+ civil society input into the policy space at the United Nations, highlights the need to question "the political and economic systems that prioritize competition over cooperation, exploitation over conservation, and profit over co-existence" because "[i]n order to create change, you have to understand power and how it operates."<sup>38</sup> From this perspective, patriarchy is necessarily intersectional in its operations. As the Women's Rights Caucus emphasizes:<sup>39</sup>

*Patriarchy, heteronormativity, cisgenderism, ableism, classism, racism, casteism, religious discrimination, corporate power, capitalism, militarism, imperialism and neocolonialism, reinforce one another and entrench structural barriers to equality, with negative implications on the lives of women and girls in all their diversity and*

37 FEMNET. 2020. "The Audacity to Disrupt: An Introduction to Feminist Macro-Level Economics." Nairobi, Kenya: The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET). p5

38 Women's Major Group. 2020. "Accelerated Action and Transformative Pathways: Realizing the Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development." 2020 High Level Political Forum Position Paper. p5

39 Women's Rights Caucus. 2019. p1

*their ability to exercise and enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms.*

At the same time, the focus on the accountability of sectoral institutions, national governments and indeed the international community must take account of the political and economic forces constraining their operations. The Mexico City feminist convening in preparation for the Beijing+25 Generation Equality Forum is clear-sighted in this regard. It insists that the “critical challenge facing the world today is the corporate capture of the state and multilateral spaces like the UN.”<sup>40</sup> As a result:<sup>41</sup>

*Private interests have increasingly come to dominate public and collective ones, creating a feedback loop in which private interests use their influence on governance to erode public resources (e.g. through right-wing regimes and neoliberal fiscal policy) creating justification for private collaboration, and also diminishing the capacity of states to regulate this same private sector nationally and extraterritorially, which solidifies corporate control and threatens due diligence, accountability, and human rights compliance.*

In light of the above, any articulation of the meaning and practice of gender transformative work with men and boys on patriarchal masculinities must reflect on the political, economic and socio-cultural forces shaping gender hierarchies and relations of power more generally, and the opportunities and constraints produced by these forces. In the sections that follow, these forces are briefly sketched, and their potential implications for the work of the Alliance discussed. ■

40 Anon. 2019. “Women Radically Transforming a World in Crisis: A Framework for Beijing+25 Shaped at a Strategy Meeting of Feminist Activists.” Mexico City, Mexico. p6

41 Ibid. p6

The background features a light beige field with a dark red diagonal stripe running from the top-left to the bottom-right. In the bottom-left corner, there is a solid dark red triangular area. On the right side, there are several thin, dark red, wavy lines that curve upwards and to the right.

**02**

# **Political Contexts**

Authoritarianism,  
Ethnonationalism and  
Militarism

## 2.1 Authoritarian politics and ‘family values’

Women’s exclusion from political life has long been central to patriarchy. The private/public distinction, confining women and girls to the feminized space of the home and masculinizing the public domain of political life, has operated for centuries in many societies and continues



**Feminist progress in rejecting these patriarchal norms and demanding political rights and power for women is increasingly being met with patriarchal backlash, evident in the rise to power of openly misogynistic authoritarian ‘strongmen’ in a number of countries.**

to this day. While women and men now vote in elections at similar rates, 76% of parliamentary seats globally are still held by men, and women represent only 5% of heads of government in 2019, lower today than even five years ago.<sup>42</sup> Recent years have even seen a troubling

rise in reports of assault, intimidation, and abuse directed at female politicians.<sup>43</sup> Politics is still seen as men’s business. The disproportionate burden of responsibility that women continue to bear for ‘domestic’ work in the home, the labor of cooking, cleaning and caring, not only limits the time that women have to participate in political life, but enables people involved in political roles and in ‘productive’ work to survive, cope with a competitive system and thrive in the current neoliberal economic system. Patriarchal norms, associating reproduction and femininity with the domestic sphere, invent women’s ‘caring instincts’ as being ill-suited to political life. The effect of such norms are to insist on the nuclear reproductive family unit as the basic pillar of a capitalist, patriarchal society.

Feminist progress in rejecting these patriarchal norms and demanding political rights and power for women is increasingly being met with patriarchal backlash, evident in the rise to power of openly misogynistic authoritarian ‘strongmen’ in a number of countries. The successful electoral campaigns of Presidents Duterte (elected to office in the Philippines on June 30, 2016), Trump (formally appointed by the Electoral College on December 19, 2016) and Bolsonaro (elected to office in Brazil on October 28, 2018) were all disfigured

42 UNDP. 2020. “Tackling Social Norms: A Game Changer for Gender Inequalities.” 2020 Human Development Perspectives. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

43 Krook, Mona Lena and Juliana Restrepo Sanín. 2019. “The Cost of Doing Politics? Analyzing Violence and Harassment against Female Politicians.” Perspectives on Politics:1-16.

by openly misogynist, homophobic and transphobic public statements and, in some cases, policy proposals. Elected to his second term as Hungary's Prime Minister in 2010, Viktor Orbán took the extraordinary step in October 2018 of revoking accreditation and funding to universities offering gender studies programs. In doing so, the Orbán administration insisted that the "Government's standpoint is that people are born either male or female... and we do not consider it acceptable for us to talk about socially-constructed genders, rather than biological sexes."<sup>44</sup> The last five years, then, have witnessed a significant regression in political discourse and public speech on issues of gender and sexuality in a number of countries, raising questions about the degree to which such political developments are the cause or consequence of a resurgent gender conservatism in such societies.

Associated with these developments is a conservative discourse of 'family values', organized around a patriarchal binary

of masculine authority and feminine domesticity. Anti-feminism is fundamental to this growing authoritarianism.

Feminist leaders and activists at a 2019 convening in Mexico City, preparing for the Beijing+25 Generation Equality Forum, emphasized that "authoritarian power is inevitably exercised by targeting women and gender-non conforming people through the regulation of their bodies, roles, freedoms, and rights."<sup>45</sup> Central to this regulation is the vision of a social order based on the patriarchal, heteronormative family, to which feminism and activism on SOGIESC<sup>46</sup> rights pose a threat. This anti-feminist politics of 'traditional' family values is evident in the increased efforts to roll back progressive legislation on sexual and reproductive health and rights in a number of countries, accompanied by increased political attacks on organizations working for SOGIESC rights and women's rights.<sup>47</sup> In this politics, the authoritarian 'strong-man' embodies, as head of the 'national family', a restoration of the 'natural' social order and its 'traditional' family values.

44 Kent, Lauren and Samantha Tapfumaneyi. 2018. "Hungary's PM Bans Gender Study at Colleges Saying 'People Are Born Either Male or Female'." CNN. Retrieved: August 5, 2020 (<https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/19/europe/hungary-bans-gender-study-at-colleges-trnd/index.html>). In October 2020, the legal basis for the gender studies ban was overturned by the European Court of Justice, in a case brought by the European Commission. The Court agreed with the European Commission that Hungary has breached WTO law, EU law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union "relating to academic freedom, the freedom to found higher education institutions and the freedom to conduct a business." See <https://www.ceu.edu/article/2020-10-06/landmark-judgment-lex-ceu-struck-down-european-court-justice>.

45 Anon. 2019. "Women Radically Transforming a World in Crisis: A Framework for Beijing+25 Shaped at a Strategy Meeting of Feminist Activists." Mexico City, Mexico. p4

46 Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics. See [https://yogyakartapinciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A5\\_yogyakartaWEB-2.pdf](https://yogyakartapinciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A5_yogyakartaWEB-2.pdf).

47 Corrêa, Sonia. 2017. "Gender Ideology: Tracking Its Origins and Meanings in Current Gender Politics." LSE Engenderings Blog. Retrieved: September 6, 2020 (<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2017/12/11/gender-ideology-tracking-its-origins-and-meanings-in-current-gender-politics/>).



**This ideology of family values is usually associated with conservative, right-wing, and far-right political parties and formations.**

This ideology of family values is usually associated with conservative, right-wing, and far-right political parties and formations. But scholarly work is revealing the extent to which such family values have been at the heart of neoliberal political visions and economic reforms. These visions and reforms have been driven by the conviction that, in the words of UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, “there’s no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families.”<sup>48</sup> As Brown suggests, “society [...] is precisely what neoliberalism set out to destroy conceptually, normatively, and practically.”<sup>49</sup> It did so by “[e]ntrepreneurializing and responsabilizing the subject and retasking families with shouldering everything previously provided by the social state (from the cost of education to the cost of dependent young, old, and infirm).”<sup>50</sup> This means that “[e]thically, dismantling society involves challenging social justice with the natural authority of traditional values.”<sup>51</sup> This constriction of the “social” continues to have profound political effects:<sup>52</sup>

*The neoliberal attack on the social is key to generating an anti-democratic culture from below while building and legitimating anti-democratic forms of state power from above. The synergy between them means that an increasingly anti-democratic citizenry is ever more willing to authorize an anti-democratic state.*

From the imposition of structural adjustment programs on the “global South” from the 1980s onwards to the welfare reforms across the “global North” from the 1990s onwards, this “neoliberal attack on the social” has undermined the idea that the State has a responsibility to maintain and enhance society, instead restricting its roles to that of ensuring law and order and the smooth functioning of the economy.

48 See <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/08/margaret-thatcher-quotes>

49 Brown, Wendy. 2020. “Neoliberalism’s Scorpion Tail.” Pp. 39-60 in *Mutant Neoliberalism: Market Rule and Political Rupture*, edited by W. Callison and Z. Manfredi. New York: Fordham University Press. p44

50 Ibid. p45

51 Ibid. p45

52 Ibid. p46

Ideas about and representations of patriarchal masculinities have been bound up in complicated ways with neoliberalism's family values and their diminution of society. On the one hand, the privatization of the State's social responsibilities centered public policy attention on the family and its functioning, especially in contexts where the promotion of women's individual economic empowerment had become an important aspect of neoliberal reform.<sup>53</sup> Accompanying structural adjustment and welfare reform was an increasing emphasis on the policy problem of "irresponsible fatherhood". Efforts to get poor women into waged work "led poor men to become hyper-visible as irresponsible partners, and as the crux of the gender policy problem."<sup>54</sup> The growth of "responsible fatherhood" programming from the 1990s onwards should thus be understood in relation to neoliberalism's family values and so too, "the risk that their interventions are complicit in the neo-liberal retreat from social provisioning."<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, the "attack on the social" associated with neoliberalism has helped create a democratic void in many countries, hollowing out political parties

and processes and reducing them to the technocratic functions of economic management. The 2008 recession threw this model of technocratic governance into crisis, and into the political void has stepped a range of anti-democratic, authoritarian leaders and forces, whose claim to restore order looks to the 'natural' hierarchy of the patriarchal family and the protector role of its father figure as the basis of their legitimacy. Efforts to push back against this patriarchal authoritarianism, with women often in the forefront of democratic struggles, as in the case of Belarus most recently, have been met with increased State violence.


Several months into the COVID-19 pandemic, and the signs are that policy responses are exacerbating rather than addressing the political dynamics discussed above.<sup>56</sup> The failure of many governments to fulfill the state-society 'social' contract of prioritizing the health and welfare of their citizens attests to the ideological success and institutional effects of the "neoliberal attack on the social". Indeed, there is evidence that many states are using the pandemic as an opportunity to heighten their surveillance and suppression of social protest and

53 Cornwall, Andrea. 2016. "Introduction: Masculinities under Neoliberalism." Pp. 1-28 in *Masculinities under Neoliberalism*, edited by A. Cornwall, F. G. Kariotis and N. Lindisfarne. London: Zed Books.

54 Bedford, Kate 2007. "The Imperative of Male Inclusion: How Institutional Context Influences World Bank Gender Policy." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9(3):289-311. p289

55 Ibid. p303

56 Ruxton, Sandy and Stephen Burrell. 2020. "Masculinities and Covid-19: Making the Connections." Washington, DC: Promundo-US.



political dissent.<sup>57</sup> The “shadow epidemic” of domestic violence resulting from the patriarchal anger and anxiety associated with lockdown measures is echoed by the masculinist ethos of national security approaches to public health, prioritizing border protection and xenophobic social control.<sup>58</sup> The capacity of women’s rights organizations and coalitions to confront this authoritarianism in political life has also been weakened with intensified State-led efforts to restrict and police civil society space in many countries.<sup>59</sup> As the feminist activists at the Mexico City convening in 2019 made clear, “[a]uthoritarian regimes rely on fear-based politics; tapping into the collective desire for ‘order and control’, they utilize ‘law and order’ politics to justify the criminalization of threats to the prevailing social, political, and economic order.”<sup>60</sup>

## 2.2 Rising ethno-nationalism

The ways in which patriarchal masculinities are implicated in this “collective desire for ‘order and control’” merit closer examination. The reliance of authoritarian politics on a model of social order based on the ‘natural’ hierarchy and presumed stability of the heteronormative family explains the prominence given to countering what conservative and far-right forces term “gender ideology”. Such forces frequently depict feminists and LGBTQIA+ activists as among the most dangerous threats to the social order because they challenge the patriarchal authority embedded in the heteronormative family. As was explained at the 2019 Mexico City convening:<sup>61</sup>

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57 Cooper, Luke and Guy Aitchison. 2020. “The Dangers Ahead: Covid-19, Authoritarianism and Democracy.” London, UK: LSE Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, London School of Economics.

58 Rees, Madeleine and Christine Chinkin. 2020. “COVID-19: Our Response Must Match the Male Leaders’ War on the Pandemic.” Retrieved: June 6, 2020 (<https://www.wilpf.org/covid-19-a-response-to-match-the-male-leaders-war-on-the-pandemic/>).

59 Hossain, Naomi, Nalini Khurana, Shandana Mohmand, Sohela Nazneen, Marjoke Oosterom, Tony Roberts, Ricardo Santos, Alex Shankland and Patrick Schröder. 2018. “What Does Closing Civic Space Mean for Development? A Literature Review and Proposed Conceptual Framework.” IDS Working Paper No. 515. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

60 Anon. 2019. p5

61 Ibid. p4



*A term increasingly used towards this end is “gender ideology,” which conservative groups in Latin America and Europe in particular have used to project distorted and fabricated versions of demands made by feminists and LGBTI communities, attack the advancement of women’s human rights and autonomy, and strengthen heteronormative ideas around sexuality and gender.*

At the same time, the metaphor of the nation-state as family has been commonly used in the rise of an ethnonationalist politics in many parts of the world. Those who are deemed not to belong to the national ‘family’ are framed as threats to the social order. Such ‘outsiders’, whether indigenous or minority communities, immigrants or refugees, are depicted as wholly Other; in other words, they are racialized as being culturally incompatible with and inferior to those who ‘naturally’ belong to the nation. Images of and ideas about masculinity are used frequently in this racialization. Narratives and representations of racialized notions of manhood have a long and widespread history, from white supremacists stoking fears of the figure of the black male rapist in the USA to the use made by Hindu nationalists of propaganda about the dangers of Muslim male sexuality in India.<sup>62</sup> Over recent years, far-right parties in Europe have fueled anti-immigrant sentiments among the white/majority population by provoking moral panics about the alleged dangers of immigration, in which the figure of the sexually violent male immigrant looms large.<sup>63</sup> Far-right propaganda, in many European countries as well as former white settler colonies (Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA), claiming that the white/majority population is under demographic threat from a rapidly growing non-white/minority population, the so-called Great Replacement narrative, also relies on stories about the unrestrained sexuality of the racialized male Other.<sup>64</sup>

These and many other examples make clear how often racist

62 Vanaik, Achin. 2018. “India’s Two Hegemonies.” *New Left Review* 112(July-August):29-59.

63 Scrinzi, Francesca. 2017. “A ‘New’ National Front? Gender, Religion, Secularism and the French Populist Radical Right.” Pp. 127-40 in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, edited by M. Köttig, R. Bitzan and A. Petö.

64 Davey, Jacob and Julia Ebner. 2019. “‘The Great Replacement’: The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism.” London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue.





**Such racialized interpretations and understanding of masculinities are put to ideological work by ethnonationalist parties and forces in calling on the white/majority population to defend ‘their’ women, families and by extension, nation, from this threat posed by the male Other**

ideologies and political formations define the threat of the “Other” in terms of masculinities which are racialized as barbarous, uncivilized, primitive. Such racialized interpretations and understanding of masculinities are put to ideological work by ethnonationalist parties and forces in calling on the white/majority population to defend ‘their’ women, families and by extension, nation, from this threat posed by the male Other. Appeals to the protector role of the white/majority male features prominently in such appeals, from protecting ‘their’ women to protecting the nation’s borders from the male Other’s sexuality and violence. From Finland to the USA, scholars have highlighted the ways in which such protection is framed in terms of white/majority “borderguard masculinities”.<sup>65</sup> In

some Western European countries where significant progress in gender equality has been made, at the formal level of law and policy at least, this threat of the ‘primitive’ male Other is also portrayed as a threat to the ‘civilized’ progress in gender relations made by the ‘West’, racialized as white.<sup>66</sup>

## 2.3 Pervasive militarism

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are being seen, too, in an intensified nationalism, with anxieties about borders,



**Feminist activists and scholars continue to note the ways in which this nationalist rhetoric of control and protection is both masculinized and militarized; nationalism, militarism and patriarchal masculinities have always been closely linked**

migrants and globalized supply chains to the fore. Governments resorted to drastic measures to manage a public health crisis, and in many places used militarized armed force against their own citizens.

65 Keskinen, Suvi. 2013. “Anti-Feminism and White Identity Politics: Political Antagonisms in Radical Rightwing Populist and Anti-Immigration Rhetoric in Finland.” *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 3(4):225–32.

66 Scrinzi. 2017.

Scapegoats proliferated as nations dove into ethno-nationalistic modes of self-preservation. Feminist activists and scholars continue to note the ways in which this nationalist rhetoric of control and protection is both masculinized and militarized; nationalism, militarism and patriarchal masculinities have always been closely linked.<sup>67</sup> A recent article by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom makes these links clear. Rees and Chinkin note that "[m]ilitarism is always the default position. We have had the 'war on drugs', the 'war on terror' and now the war on a virus."<sup>68</sup> As they continue:<sup>69</sup>

*This militarism is dependent on the elevation of a particular construction of masculinity which necessitates a binary notion of gender. It is dangerous; war requires loyalty, deepens gendered divisions and sets in place a framework which, even before the curve is flattened, establishes what the post-pandemic priorities will be, unless alternatives become established policy now.*

In this way, COVID-19 provides yet another reminder of how deeply fused are militarism and patriarchal masculinity.<sup>70</sup> Military weapons and military involvement have long been ways for men to prove 'their' masculinity. As the Women Peacemakers Program has observed, "there is a strong correlation between carrying guns and notions of masculinity. Inside and outside of armed conflict, the so-called gun culture is overwhelmingly associated with cultural norms of masculinity, including men and boys as protectors and as warriors."<sup>71</sup> At the same time, military institutions rely on images and narratives of patriarchal masculinities for their recruitment and internal 'culture'. Geuskens notes that:<sup>72</sup>

*The military uses images of masculinity to draw boys and men to the military. Even though in many countries the military has opened up for women and queer people, it still strongly relies on images of masculinities. These images are based on a readiness to use violence and highlight the importance of physical strength.*

67 Goldstein, Joshua S. 2001. *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

68 Rees, Madeleine and Christine Chinkin. 2020. "Covid-19: Our Response Must Match the Male Leaders' War on the Pandemic." Retrieved: June 6, 2020 (<https://www.wilpf.org/covid-19-a-response-to-match-the-male-leaders-war-on-the-pandemic/>).

69 Ibid

70 Hearn, Jeff. 2011. "Men/Masculinities: War/Militarism - Searching (for) the Obvious Connections?" Pp. 35-48 in *Making Gender, Making War: Violence, Military and Peacekeeping Practices*, edited by A. Kronsell and E. Svedberg. New York, NY and Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

71 Geuskens, Isabelle, Merle Gosewinkel and Sophie Schellens. 2014. "Gender and Militarism: Analyzing the Links to Strategize for Peace." Women Peacemakers Program. p15

72 Geuskens, Isabelle. 2014. "Gender and Militarism: Policy Brief." The Hague, Netherlands: Women Peacemakers Program. p5

Studies of non-state terrorist groups also highlight their use of memes of emasculation, virility and protection in their recruitment messaging,<sup>73</sup> and the violent misogyny which often infuses their political ideology.<sup>74</sup> The pervasiveness of militarism, and its associated militarized masculinities, was emphasized at the Mexico City feminist convening in 2019:<sup>75</sup>

*Underpinned by a burgeoning global military-industrial complex, militarization in the name of national security infiltrates everyday life as the military is co-opted into civilian functions like civil governance, climate change, humanitarian and development systems, criminal justice, and policing. These public security forces are some of the biggest perpetrators of violence against women and other marginalised groups.*

That 2020 is not only the year of COVID-19 but also the twentieth anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which initiated the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, has been highlighted by many feminists. As Anderlini writes, the “pandemic is also revitalising criticism of the ballooning military budgets and the cost and carnage of the forever wars, while calling for investment in health, education and public infrastructures.”<sup>76</sup> The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda is thus relevant across a whole set of issues, by reframing sustainable and equitable development in terms of human rather than national security, for:<sup>77</sup> in calling for human security that is people-centric and a gendered lens, the resolution and the agenda convey the paradigm shift needed in understanding and tackling contemporary global peace

73 Messerschmidt, James W. and Achim Rohde. 2018. “Osama Bin Laden and His Jihadist Global Hegemonic Masculinity.” *Gender & Society* 32(5):663-85.

74 Johnston, Melissa and Jacqui True. 2019. “Misogyny and Violent Extremism: Implications for Preventing Violent Extremism.” Melbourne, Australia: Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre, Monash University.

75 Anon 2019. p4

76 Anderlini, Sanam Naraghi. 2020. “Women Peace and Security in the Time of Corona.” Retrieved: August 2, 2020 (<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2020/03/25/women-peace-and-security-in-the-time-of-corona/>).

77 Ibid.

and security issues. The issues that are so often called for by the WPS community are profoundly relevant to this pandemic too.



**There is a concern that the ways in which issues of masculinities are being framed in the context of the WPS agenda, for example in relation to security sector reform programming, runs the risk of reinforcing the depoliticizing effects of the “good men” approach.**

But the power of the global military-industrial complex, and its associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities, continues to inhibit progress on the WPS agenda and its gendered human security paradigm. As the UN Secretary-General's 2015 report on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 emphasized, “[m]ilitarism and cultures of militarized masculinities create and sustain political decision-making where resorting to the use of force becomes a normalized mode for dispute resolution.”<sup>78</sup>

To address this, the report urged Member States, the UN and civil society to “[p]rovide financial, technical and political support to encourage educational and leadership training for men, women, boys and girls, which reinforces and supports nonviolent, non-militarized expressions of masculinities.”<sup>79</sup> Given the above, it is clear that intensified efforts to challenge and transform patriarchal militarized masculinities are urgently needed.

What these efforts should look like in practice remains in question, however. There is a concern that the ways in which issues of masculinities are being framed in the context of the WPS agenda, for example in relation to security sector reform programming, runs the risk of reinforcing the depoliticizing effects of the “good men” approach. Duriesmith describes the emergence of this approach in relation to the proliferation of “male engagement” programming over the last two decades. As he explains:<sup>80</sup>

*The international move to “engagement work” should be understood as the development of a “good men” industry, rather than an independent movement. This is because of the rapid shift to engagement work, the role of donors in driving this shift, and the central role of international actors in promoting*

78 UN Women. 2015. “Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.” New York: UN Women. p207

79 Ibid. p214

80 Duriesmith, David. 2017. p8

*programmes centred around positive notions of masculinity.*

In “developing policies that treat masculinities only as conscious attitudes (excluding issues of affect, practice, economic structure, relations to other positions, identity, etc)”, the “good men” approach “risks reinforcing harmful narratives that violence is caused by a few bad men who consciously hold misogynist beliefs about women.”<sup>81</sup> As Duriesmith warns, “it is worth remaining attentive to how WPS might become a new frontier for the “good men” industry to invest in.”<sup>82</sup> Other scholars have highlighted the neocolonial dynamics of the WPS agenda; in the Global North it is set up as an external agenda (run by Foreign Affairs and intended to run international interventions in countries in the Global South) while in the Global South it tends to be an internal agenda, run by Social Affairs and focused on challenging gender inequities within the state borders. The adoption of a masculinities approach within this context runs the risk of reinforcing neocolonial narratives of the dangerous masculinities of the racialized Other, distracting attention away from the fusion of male supremacy and white supremacy in the military cultures and war-making practices of countries in the Global North.<sup>83</sup>

## **2.4**

### **Implications for transforming patriarchal masculinities**

Identifying and implementing responses to the contexts and challenges outlined above should be ongoing work for all involved with the gender transformative work with men and boys. Policy advocacy on SRHR issues and SOGIESC rights, in partnership and solidarity with feminist and LGBTQIA+ leaders and organizations, has been an important focus of the Alliance’s work during 2017-2020 period, and we believe must continue given the “anti-gender”

81 Ibid. p10

82 Ibid. p9

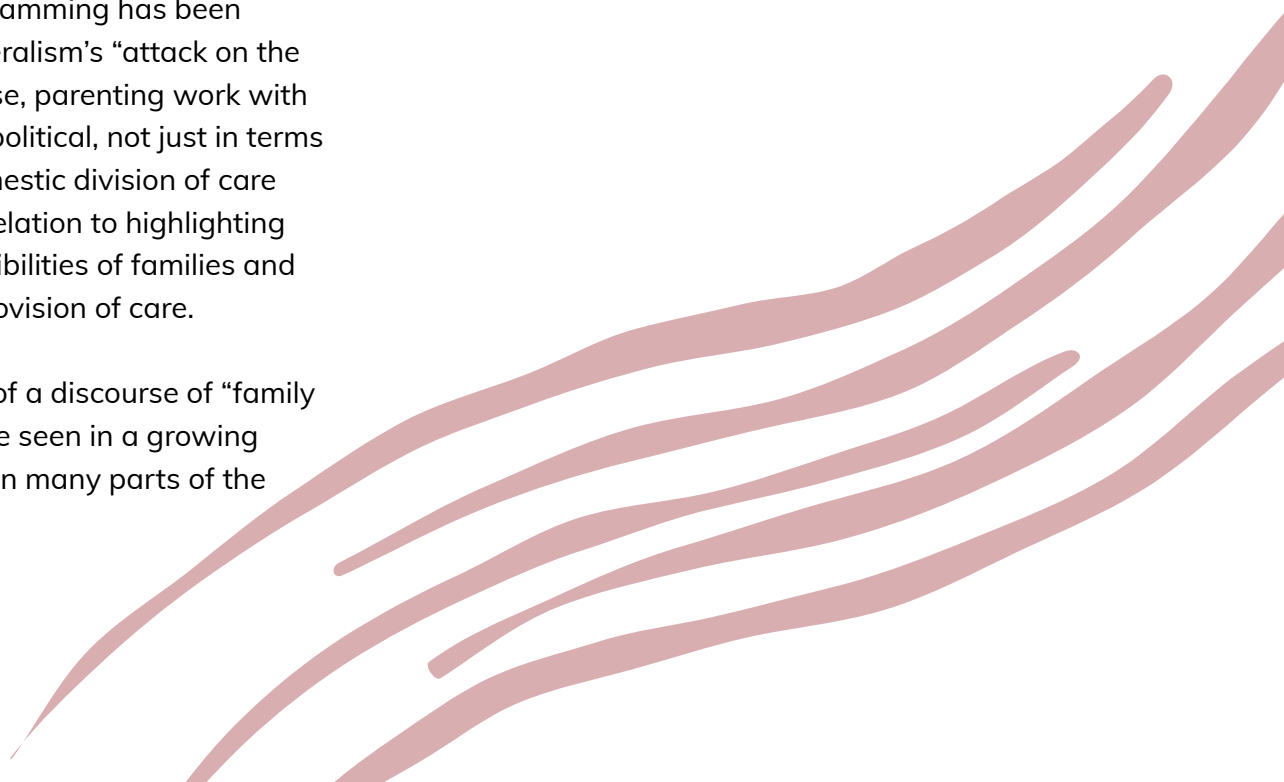
83 Swaine, Aisling and Michael N. Barnett. 2017. “Enabling or Disabling Paternalism: (in) Attention to Gender and Women’s Knowledge, Capacity, and Authority in Humanitarian Contexts.” Pp. 185-223 in *Paternalism Beyond Borders*, edited by M. N. Barnett. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

organizing in intergovernmental spaces described above. Such organizing, and a backlash against progressive gains in women's rights and rights for LGBTQIA+ communities, is evident in many countries. Feminist and LGBTQIA+ organizations are confronting this backlash in national and regional policy spaces, which those involved in gender transformative work with men and boys must be active in supporting, at all levels.

Promoting democratic reform to advance women's rights and rights for LGBTQIA+ communities has not to-date been a significant focus of gender justice work with men and boys. MenEngage Alliance believes that we have an opportunity to ensure that gender transformative work with men and boys is taken into political processes and spaces, including political parties themselves. One also needs to be alert to the ways in which "Positive Fatherhood" programming has been enlisted by neoliberalism's "attack on the social". In this sense, parenting work with men is inherently political, not just in terms of shifting the domestic division of care work, but also in relation to highlighting the linked responsibilities of families and the State in the provision of care.

The political uses of a discourse of "family values" can also be seen in a growing ethnonationalism in many parts of the

world. Calls to protect the nation-as-family often rely on racialized narratives and images of the sexually violent male other. Building stronger partnerships with anti-racist movements, indigenous people's struggles and immigrant and refugee rights organizations to confront this use of racialized masculinities should be an urgent priority for those involved in gender transformative work with men and boys. So too is the continuing need to highlight the interdependence of militarism and military-industrial complex with the maintenance of patriarchal masculinities. As the COVID-19 pandemic has only further highlighted, a masculinized militarist mindset is widespread across many aspects of not only military but also civilian life. This field must continue to develop our knowledge base, political stance and share lessons as to how best to challenge and transform such patriarchal militarized masculinities. ■



03

# Economic Contexts

Neoliberalism,  
Climate Crisis and  
Care Economies



*Our economic rules have been written by rich and powerful men in their own interests. The neoliberal economic model of today has made this worse – cuts to public services, cuts to taxes for the richest individuals and corporations, and a race to the bottom on wages have all hurt women more than men.*<sup>84</sup>

### 3.1 Links between gender injustice and economic injustice

Poverty and economic marginalization are deeply gendered. Women in the 25-34 year old age group are more likely to live in poor households: 122 women for every 100 men.<sup>85</sup> Globally, women earn 23% less than men; over their lifetimes women have less opportunity than men to engage in paid work, they earn less in more precarious or poorly paid work, and are less able to invest in assets (such as land, credit, insurance and skills).<sup>86</sup> In Mexico, girls born in the

poorest 20% of the population have twice the probability of remaining poor throughout their lifetime than their male counterparts.<sup>87</sup> Land remains the most important asset in many societies, yet, women still account for only 12.8% of agricultural landholders in the world.<sup>88</sup> In many cases, this economic injustice is legally mandated. Discriminatory laws continue to threaten women's economic security, career growth, and work-life balance. On average, women have just three-fourths of the legal rights afforded to men. Ninety countries still have at least one restriction on the jobs women are permitted to do.<sup>89</sup> Discriminatory laws oppress LGBTQIA+ communities in many ways, including economic. Although adequate data on the economic marginalization faced by LGBTQIA+ people is missing for many countries, what data exists makes clear that "indicators of economic disparity including food insecurity, housing instability, low-wage earning potential, and unemployment and under-employment are all heightened for LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities."<sup>90</sup>

84 Lawson, Max, Man-Kwun Chan, Francesca Rhodes, Anam Parvez Butt, Anna Marriott, Ellen Ehmke, Didier Jacobs, Julie Seghers, Jaime Atienza and Rebecca Gowland. 2019. "Public Good or Private Wealth?" Oxfam Briefing Paper. Oxford, UK: Oxfam International.

85 Boudet, Ana Maria Munoz, Paola Buitrago, Benedicte Leroy de la Briere, David Newhouse, Eliana Rubiano Matulevich, Kinnon Scott and Pablo Suarez-Becerra. 2018. "Gender Differences in Poverty and Household Composition through the Life-Cycle: A Global Perspective." Policy Research Working Paper 8360. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

86 Lawson et al. 2019.

87 Ibid.

88 FAO. 2015. "Gender and Land Statistics: Recent Developments in Fao's Gender and Land Rights Database." Rome, Italy: Food and Agriculture Organization.

89 World Bank. 2020. "Women, Business and the Law 2020." Washington, DC: World Bank.

90 Hunter, Lourdes Ashley, Ashe McGovern and Carla Sutherland. 2018. "Intersecting Injustice: Addressing LGBTQ Poverty

A 2013 survey conducted by Transgender and Intersex Africa (TIA) found high levels of unemployment among trans and intersex South Africans.<sup>91</sup>

For several decades now, women's economic empowerment has been a centerpiece of Gender and Development policy and programming. Watkins notes the progress made: "A mass of data now shows that women have entered the global waged-labour force in their hundreds of millions since the 1970s", while in "tertiary education, girls outnumber boys in over seventy countries."<sup>92</sup> But she also emphasizes that "advances in gender equality have gone hand-in-hand with soaring socio-economic inequality across most of the world."<sup>93</sup> UN Women concurs, reporting that "in a world where wealth and assets are increasingly concentrated and controlled by a fraction of the global population, women's gains have been uneven between countries, and among different groups of women."<sup>94</sup>

These soaring inequalities and uneven gains produced by neoliberal capitalism have long been the target of feminist critique and struggle. As the 2019 feminist convening in Mexico City made clear, neoliberal policies "have exacerbated existing inequalities of power, particularly along the fault lines of resource and wealth disparities between countries, between rich and poor, between men and women, and between dominant and oppressed racial and ethnic groups."<sup>95</sup> These disparities have been further exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights has recently emphasized, "[f]ar from being the 'great leveler,' COVID-19 is a pandemic of poverty, exposing the parlous state of

and Economic Justice for All: A National Call to Action." New York: Social Justice Sexuality Project, Graduate Center, City University of New York. p1

91 Spira, Tamara Lea, Namita Chad and Irene Schneeweis. 2015. "South Africa Lgbti: Landscape Analysis of Political, Economic & Social Conditions." New York, NY: Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice.

92 Watkins, Susan. 2018. "Which Feminisms?". New Left Review 109 (January-February): 5-76. p6

93 Ibid. p7

94 UN Women. 2019. "Progress of the World's Women 2019-2020: Families in a Changing World." New York: UN Women. p15

95 Anon 2019. p2

social safety nets for those on lower incomes or in poverty around the world.”<sup>96</sup>

The 2019 Feminist Declaration by the Women's Rights Caucus makes clear the links between this economic injustice and gender oppression. The Declaration insists that “the neoliberal economic order is a key structural barrier that since 1995 has exacerbated inequalities within and between countries and among genders” and that:<sup>97</sup>

*Patriarchy and other systems of oppression reinforce this economic system, which has allowed a small number of wealthy individuals to gain more power, has compromised democratic systems of governance worldwide and allowed authoritarian, fascist and populist figures to thrive.*

Given this, in the words of the Mexico City feminist convening, “[w]omen have long been at the forefront of struggles against this system, understanding it to be fundamentally incompatible with the liberation and empowerment of women, and transgender and gender non-conforming people.”<sup>98</sup>

Gender justice work with men on issues of women's economic marginalization has, for the most part, yet to catch up with this broader systemic analysis, led by feminists from the Global South and feminists from communities of color and indigenous communities in the Global North. Still confined within an individualized neoliberal paradigm of women's empowerment and entrepreneurship, work with men has been framed in terms of reducing their opposition to such empowerment. In practice, this has led to the development of group education programs for the male partners of women targeted by microcredit schemes and income generation interventions,



**Gender justice work with men on issues of women's economic marginalization has, for the most part, yet to catch up with this broader systemic analysis, led by feminists from the Global South and feminists from communities of color and indigenous communities in the Global North**

96 Alston, Philip. 2020. “The Parlous State of Poverty Eradication: Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.” Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Human Rights Council, Forty-fourth session 15 June–3 July 2020: Agenda item 3 “Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development”. p9

97 Women's Rights Caucus. 2019. para 4

98 Anon 2019. p2

whose “masculinities” component has focused on adjusting men’s expectations of being the family breadwinner and improving couple communication within the household.<sup>99</sup>

There is evidence to suggest that “[w]here women’s gains have coincided with men’s declining economic prospects, gender dynamics have become particularly fraught, aggravating relationship breakdown and men’s failure to financially or otherwise support their children.”<sup>100</sup> But framing responses to this solely in terms of change at the individual level only masks the deeper and entwined problems of gender and economic injustice produced by neoliberal capitalism. As the Women’s Rights Caucus insists:<sup>101</sup>

*Economic empowerment should not be defined with a narrow focus on women’s participation in economic markets, but rather focus on women’s ability to exercise real power over their economic, social, political and cultural structures, as well as equally benefit from the advancement and development of the society.*

This emphasis on the need to “exercise real power over their economic, social, political and cultural structures” calls attention to the problems of the informalization of the economy, precarious employment and lack of access to social and legal protection and institutional benefits. Women are over-represented in sectors more likely to be unregulated due to their broader and intersectional marginalization across social, political, cultural and economic fronts, and as a result face not only increased economic exploitation but also less protection from workplace harassment, exploitation and violence. The 2019 feminist convening in Mexico City noted that:<sup>102</sup>

*Migrant workers are often denied basic rights in their country of*

99 Edström, Jerker, Alexa Hassink, Thea Shahrokh and Erin Stern. 2015. “Engendering Men: A Collaborative Review of Evidence on Men and Boys in Social Change and Gender Equality.” EMERGE Evidence Review. Promundo-US, Sonke Gender Justice and the Institute of Development Studies.

100 UN Women. 2019. “Progress of the World’s Women 2019-2020: Families in a Changing World.” New York: UN Women. p135

101 Women’s Rights Caucus. 2019. para 15

102 Anon 2019. p7

*work; domestic workers, often doubly marginalized as migrants in the informal sector, exist in a heightened state of precarity due to inadequate labor protections; and sex workers, largely constituted of women, and transgender and gender non-conforming people, experience some of the highest rates of workplace violence due to the stigmatized and unregulated nature of their work.*



### **Answering the question of what these structural analyses and systemic critiques mean for gender justice work with men and boys is an urgent priority**

Answering the question of what these structural analyses and systemic critiques mean for gender justice work with men and boys is an urgent priority. The importance of building the capacity to “exercise collective power” directs attention to the potential for work with labor unions. The Women’s Rights Caucus urges to “[r]ecognize the role of unions in advancing women’s rights and gender equality by respecting, promoting and protecting the right to freedom of association and the right to organize and

bargain collectively, including by removal of laws and restrictions on these rights [...]”<sup>103</sup> Similarly, the Women’s Major Group is clear that “trade unions serve as a powerful counterweight to corporate power and monopolies and play an important role in bringing about a more just and equitable economic order.”<sup>104</sup> In many countries, labor unions remain male-dominated in their leadership, suggesting that they could be an important entry-point for gender transformative work with men to ensure that organized labour addresses fully the linked problems of gender and economic injustices.

Addressing these links also means recognizing not only gender differences but also class solidarities. The informalization of work, lack of labour protections and deepening of inequalities affects millions of working class men as well as working class women. Writing in 2005, leading theorist of masculinities Raewyn Connell drew attention to “a growing polarization among men on a world scale,” with “a privileged minority reaching astonishing heights of wealth and power while much larger numbers face poverty, cultural dislocation, disruption of family relationships, and forced renegotiation of the meanings of masculinity.”<sup>105</sup> More recently, Connell has noted the “coloniality” that continues to structure the global economy and its

103 Women’s Rights Caucus. 2019. para 16(c)

104 Women’s Major Group. 2020. p6

105 Connell, Raewyn (2005) “Change among the Gatekeepers: Men, Masculinities, and Gender Equality in the Global

gendered, racialized divisions of labor and class stratifications; this “coloniality of gender concerns not only the old form of imperialism, but also new forms of dependency and global power.”<sup>106</sup> As she continues:<sup>107</sup>

*The international economy has less need of the plantation workforces of the past. But gendered exploitation flourishes in the factories of the ‘south China miracle’, the maquilas of the Mexican borderlands, the huge expatriate workforce of the oil industry in the Persian Gulf states, or among the ‘baomu’, migrant domestic workers, of neo-liberal China. Transnational corporations operate through relations between a masculinized managerial elite and gender-divided local workforces.*

Rapid urbanization is only compounding this poverty, dislocation and exploitation. Cities will account for all future world population growth, which is expected to peak at about 10 billion in 2050.<sup>108</sup> What is more, this urban population growth is concentrated in informal settlements. The informalization of the economies of many societies has meant that urbanization

“has been radically decoupled from industrialization, even from development per se,”<sup>109</sup> meaning that “at the end of the day, a majority of urban slum-dwellers are truly and radically homeless in the contemporary international economy.”<sup>110</sup>

The global economy was in trouble even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a slowing down of economic activities, and much longer trends in industrial overcapacity, and the problem of continuously rising under-employment, increasingly concentrated in lightly or unregulated service sectors, in which workers are at increased risk of economic exploitation. As Benanav warns:<sup>111</sup> Unless halted by concerted political action, the coming decades are likely to see more of the same: overcapacity in international markets for agricultural and industrial products will continue to push workers out of those sectors and into services, which will see its share of global employment climb from 52 per cent today to 70 or 80 per cent by mid-century.

ILO reports that 267 million young people aged 15 to 24 worldwide (or 22% of that age group) are not in any form of

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Arena.” Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 30(3): 1801-1825. p1805

106 Connell, Raewyn. 2014. “Margin Becoming Centre: For a World-Centred Rethinking of Masculinities.” NORMA: The International Journal for Masculinity Studies 9(4):217-31. p226

107 Ibid. p226

108 Davis, Mike. 2004. “Planet of the Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat.” New Left Review 26(March-April):5-34.

109 Ibid. p9

110 Ibid. p26

111 Ibid. p129

employment, education or training.<sup>112</sup> On the one hand, these long-term trends make clear the shared interests that millions of workers, of all genders, have in pushing for fundamental economic reform. On the other hand, the tying of masculinity to waged work, dating back to the rise of industrial capitalism in the 19th century, means that the growth of precarious, under-employment can often be experienced as a crisis of masculinity.

Noting what is often referred to as the “new ‘crisis of masculinity’ amongst male members of the working class and underclass across the Western contexts”,<sup>113</sup> Roose among others warns that “the state and political status quo are battling to counter the emotionally manipulative narratives of populist movements that capture the alienation, anxiety, anger, humiliation and resentment of marginalised young men.”<sup>114</sup> In other words, the economic concerns of marginalized men, tied to their expectations of and sense of entitlement to waged work, is being exploited for politically regressive purposes in many societies. Building cross-gender class solidarities to challenge the exploitation and inequalities produced by the current neoliberal economic order must involve efforts to change the persistent and dominant narrative that connects masculinity to waged work in many societies. Gender justice work with men and boys has a role to play in helping to shift this narrative and contribute to promoting a vision of economic justice for people of all genders.



**The economic concerns of marginalized men, tied to their expectations of and sense of entitlement to waged work, is being exploited for politically regressive purposes in many societies**

## 3.2 Climate crisis

The risks of not securing this vision of economic justice are existential. The current neoliberal economic system is not only wrecking lives, but destroying the basis of life for future generations. Climate

112 ILO. 2020. “World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020.” Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Organization.

113 Roose, Joshua (2017) “Citizenship, Masculinities and Political Populism. Preliminary Considerations in the Context of Contemporary Social Challenges.” In The Transformation of Citizenship (vol. 3): Struggle, Resistance and Violence, edited by J. Mackert & B. Turner, 56–76. Abingdon, UK: Routledge. p63

114 Ibid. p58



change is one of the most urgent global challenges facing the world today. We are the first generation to know that we are capable of undermining the Earth's delicate ecosystem and most likely the last generation with the ability to do anything about it. The warning issued by the 2019 feminist convening in Mexico City could not be starker:<sup>115</sup>



**Of particular concern to MenEngage Alliance, and our commitment to transform patriarchal masculinities, is the long-standing eco-feminist analysis of climate change as rooted in histories of colonial resource extraction and capitalist industrial production, which themselves are shaped and legitimated by a patriarchal logic of domination and exploitation**

*Global warming is profoundly reshaping communities, ecosystems and the biosphere, threatening their very survival. Rooted in neoliberal capitalism*

*and exacerbated by an extractivist development model and fossil fuel dependence, this system is increasing inequalities and violence within and between states, and hastening the current sixth Anthropocene mass extinction of 150-200 species per day through habitat destruction, overhunting, toxic pollution, non-endemic species invasion, and climate change.*

The gender dimensions of the climate crisis are well documented.<sup>116</sup> Of particular concern to this field, and its commitments to transform patriarchal masculinities, is the long-standing eco-feminist analysis of climate change as rooted in histories of colonial resource extraction and capitalist industrial production, which themselves are shaped and legitimated by a patriarchal logic of domination and exploitation. This is not an abstract logic. Analysis of carbon producing entities, such as oil corporations, finds that 90% of historical emissions since the 1750s can be traced to the 90 largest fossil fuel and cement producers, most still in business today, and all of them dominated by male ownership, leadership and staff.<sup>117</sup> Proposals for a “green transition” to a post-carbon economy fueled by renewable energy must address the need to confront this patriarchal logic and the masculinized corporate and industrial power structures

115 Anon. 2019. p2-3

116 Kato-Wallace, Jane. et.al. 2019. “Men, Masculinities & Climate Change: A Discussion Paper.” Washington, DC: MenEngage Alliance.

117 Heede, Richard. 2014. “Tracing Anthropogenic Carbon Dioxide and Methane Emissions to Fossil Fuel and Cement Producers, 1854–2010.” *Climatic Change* 122:229– 41.



it has sustained.

In very practical terms, any transition to 'green' economies must deal with the radical transformation of capitalist, neocolonial and male-dominated industries. The masculinization of industrial production and extractivist economies means that the "green transition" must involve transformation in gender narratives about the future of work. Such a transition must also contend with the male-dominated corporate and State elites who benefit from the current neoliberal economic order, and the violence they unleash to protect their vested interests. As the Mexico City feminist convening made clear:<sup>118</sup>

*Global capital is more fearsome than ever, shepherded through decades of unrestrained growth and extractivism by neoliberal dominance, and unchecked by neo-extractivist developmentalist models. In its pursuit of profit, it has caused ecological devastation, underdevelopment, violence, and repression through deepening authoritarianism worldwide.*

The impacts have been most devastating on the most marginalized.<sup>119</sup> This intersectional feminist understanding of the climate catastrophe highlights the intersectional nature of the gender inequalities unleashed as a result. Women and girls from affected communities have been in the forefront of struggles defending their rights in the face of threats posed by corporate and State elites. Participants at the Mexico City convening in 2019 drew attention to the fact that "[w]ith the rise of public private partnerships (PPPs) in areas as diverse as natural resource extraction, energy, infrastructure and social provisioning, private interests are invading areas central to women's lives and livelihoods."<sup>120</sup> As they highlighted:

118 Anon. 2019. p2

119 The Mexico City feminist convening noted that the effects of climate change are "particularly acute for those living in small island states and territories, least developed countries, the global South, as well as for indigenous peoples, urban poor, rural and remote communities, Afro-descendant people, people with disabilities, migrant communities, LGBTI people, ethnic minorities, girls, the elderly, communities experiencing descent and work based discrimination, and many others." Anon 2019. p3

120 Ibid. p6



**The degradation of livelihoods and biospheres produced by climate change is also fueling an unprecedented displacement and movement of people, both within and between countries and across continents**

*In many contexts, resistance to these projects is met with violence, including sexual violence; limits to freedom of expression and association; and threats to the right to life as women human rights defenders are arbitrarily detained, tortured, disappeared, and killed with impunity in the face of state complicity and inaction.*

The degradation of livelihoods and biospheres produced by climate change is also fueling an unprecedented displacement and movement of people, both within and between countries and across continents. As many studies have shown, women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people face many forms of violence and exploitation at all stages of their journeys as migrants and refugees, from State officials, military personnel and criminal gangs alike.<sup>121</sup> Recent research by the Women's Refugee Commission to examine the nature and characteristics of sexual violence perpetrated against refugees and migrants traveling the central Mediterranean route to Italy found that sexual violence against all refugees and migrants was common not only for women and girls, but also for men and boys as well as gender non-conforming people. The study also found that sexual violence, including sexual torture, against female and male refugees and migrants appeared widespread in Libya.<sup>122</sup> In thinking through the links between patriarchal masculinities and climate catastrophe, it is evident that the many forms of gender-based violences and other forms of injustice associated with it must be more clearly addressed, and those responsible held accountable.

### 3.3 Care economies

Events of 2020 have made clearer than ever before that the restructuring required by the transition to a post-carbon economy also requires new visions of the labour and social relations of care, for both current and future generations. The Feminist Impact for

<sup>121</sup> See <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/gender-based-violence-against-women-both-cause-migration-and-risk-along-journey>

<sup>122</sup> Chynoweth, Sarah. 2019. "More Than One Million Pains": Sexual Violence against Men and Boys on the Central Mediterranean Route to Italy." New York, NY: Women's Refugee Commission.

Rights and Equality Consortium (FIRE), a collective of five global organisations committed to accelerating a feminist vision of international peace and human security, makes clear that “[h]uman-driven environmental degradation, climate change and a capitalist economic system that prioritises economic growth and profit above all else have made the emergence and spread of COVID-19 and other zoonotic viruses not only possible but also highly likely.”<sup>123</sup> The rapid onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the frailty of care systems in many societies, weakened in many cases by the neoliberal “retreat from social provisioning” discussed earlier. At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted once again how central gender inequalities are to care work, whether unpaid or low paid. Research makes clear the extent to which responsibilities for household work, nursing the sick, and caring for children and the elderly have only further intensified for women and girls during COVID-19.<sup>124</sup>



**The rapid onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the frailty of care systems in many societies, weakened in many cases by the neoliberal “retreat from social provisioning” discussed earlier**

Efforts to redress gender inequalities in the care economy have long been an important focus of gender justice programming and policy-making. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’s goal on Gender Equality (Goal 5) recognizes the need to address the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work borne by women and girls. Many studies highlight that “‘motherhood penalties’ in the form of reduced employment rates and a pay gap between women with and without children are a persistent problem.”<sup>125</sup> Compared to men, women do three times the amount of unpaid care and domestic work within families, with particularly stark inequalities in many Global South contexts, where access to time-saving infrastructure and public services is more limited.<sup>126</sup> In its 2019 Feminist Declaration, the Women’s Rights Caucus calls on “governments to commit to direct efforts toward the realization

123 FIRE Consortium. 2020. “Feminist Principles for an International Post-Covid-19 Settlement: Presented to the United Nations General Assembly.” New York, NY: Feminist Impact for Rights and Equality (FIRE) Consortium. p9

124 Bolis, Mara, Anam Parvez, Emma Holten, Leah Mugehera, Nabil Abdo and Maria Jose Moreno. 2020. “Care in the Time of Coronavirus: Why Care Work Needs to Be at the Centre of a Post-Covid-19 Feminist Future.” Oxfam Briefing Paper. Oxford, UK: Oxfam International.

125 UN Women. 2019. “Progress of the World’s Women 2019-2020: Families in a Changing World.” New York: UN Women. p15

126 Ibid.

of economic, social and cultural rights of women, girls and gender non-conforming persons”, including “the recognition, reduction and redistribution of care and domestic work”.<sup>127</sup>

The impacts of COVID-19 lockdown measures have only heightened this disparity, with most research suggesting that even when men and boys are denied the ability to leave the home, it is the women and girls in the family who continue to do most of the household work.<sup>128</sup> The recognition that men and boys can support progress toward both gender and economic justice by participating more actively and equitably in the work of ‘cooking, cleaning and caring’ has driven the significant expansion in fatherhood and/or parenting programming and policy advocacy in recent years, and the attention given to the care economy in gender justice work with men more generally.<sup>129</sup> An orientation toward the individual as the site and agent of change continues to shape both programming and policy advocacy on men’s relationship to and responsibilities within care economies.

In its recommendations, the State of the World’s Fathers report focuses its call for a

transformation in gender norms prioritizes, however its four proposed strategies primarily focus on changing individual attitudes to “training to change attitudes” and “media campaigns to inspire men, their families, and their communities to support men’s caregiving.”<sup>130</sup> The most recent recommendations by the global MenCare campaign lay an important emphasis on the need to “improve laws and policies” (e.g. on “equal, fully paid, non-transferable parental leave for all parents”) and to “transform social and gender norms” (e.g. “governments must provide training to change attitudes of service providers such as teachers, child care workers and health care providers”). This emphasis on the need for structural change is further reinforced by its call to “guarantee economic and physical security for vulnerable families.”<sup>131</sup>

The need to address the structural dimensions of care economies is also emphasized by UN Women, in its 2018 report discussing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. It makes explicit reference to the “institutional framework for care,” which includes “the family but also the market, the state and the not-for-profit sector, constituting a

127 Women’s Rights Caucus. 2019. para 15

128 MADRE. 2020. “Care and Connection in Crisis: Feminist Strategy to Confront Covid-19.” New York, NY: MADRE.

129 van der Gaag, Nikki, Brian Heilman, Taveeshi Gupta, Ché Nembhard and Gary Barker. 2019. “State of the World’s Fathers: Unlocking the Power of Men’s Care.” Washington, DC: Promundo-US.

130 Ibid. p57

131 Ibid. p10

‘care diamond’.”<sup>132</sup> This institutional analysis underpins the politics of redistribution that informs the report’s ability to frame the gendered challenges of redistributing care work beyond the gender binary of the heteronormative family unit. It makes clear that “[r]edistribution requires policies that ensure that the provision of care is shared more equitably among families, states, markets and the not-for-profit sector, as well as between women and men within families.”<sup>133</sup>

This formulation can help to broaden perspectives on and understanding of men’s differing relationships to and responsibilities within care economies, beyond the “fatherhood” frame and its emphasis on men’s familial responsibilities toward children. Such a formulation enables a consideration of the unpaid and underpaid feminized care workforce, transnational care supply chains, the long-term needs of care-dependent older persons and the basic infrastructures of water, sanitation, food security, transport and accessible, affordable and quality early childhood education and care that support the provision of unpaid care and domestic work. If gender transformative work with men and boys is to embrace this broad formulation and address the patriarchal dimensions of the issues outlined above, then it must take care not to be complicit with a public policy discourse on the care economy that centers attention on the family and men’s “irresponsible” masculinity. For, as discussed earlier, it is this discourse of men’s “irresponsible” masculinity on which the “family values” ideology of neoliberalism has, in part, relied.

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, the Mexico City convening outlined a radical feminist agenda to “recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work.”<sup>134</sup> This included:<sup>135</sup>

*Ensuring universal access to quality public care services; guaranteeing living wages and access to social protection in care jobs; significantly increasing public investment in the care economy; mandating paid parental and family leave; and providing pension*



**If gender transformative work with men and boys is to embrace this broad formulation and address the patriarchal dimensions of the issues outlined above, then it must take care not to be complicit with a public policy discourse on the care economy that centers attention on the family and men’s “irresponsible” masculinity.**

132 UN Women. 2018. p219

133 Ibid. p224

134 Anon. 2019. p12

135 Ibid. p12

*care credits for time spent out of the labour force to raise children/ care for dependants.*

Advocacy in support of this radical agenda is one clear priority for organizations and networks concerned with challenging patriarchal masculinities. But perhaps a bigger challenge for such organizations and networks, seeking to work in solidarity with feminist visions of economic transformation for intersectional gender justice, is to envision relations of care for each other and for the planet that transcend the masculine-feminine binary separating production from social reproduction. As a recent paper by Oxfam reports, many “ecofeminist and indigenous ethicists have argued that care is a determinant aspect of the interdependency between communities, society and the environment” and that not only an ethics but also a politics of care must be centred/foregrounded “when the aim is to support communities to exercise their power and care for themselves and the planet.”<sup>136</sup> But, as the report continues, “[c]aring for the planet, however, is too often framed as a ‘feminine’ attitude and rejected by machista (male chauvinist), patriarchal value systems that devalue and erase the work of women, translating into an eco-gender gap.”<sup>137</sup> It is this binary distinction between masculinized ‘work’ and feminized ‘care’ that must be overcome.

### 3.4

## Implications for transforming patriarchal masculinities

What might these economic contexts mean for gender transformative work with men and boys? Answering this question will, once again, should be a significant focus for the work of those in this area of work moving forward. The challenge for gender transformative work with men and boys is to identify the contributions that such work can make to the radical systems change called for by feminists the world

136 Piaget, Kim, Clare Coffey, Sebastián Molano and Maria José Moreno Ruiz. 2020. “Feminist Futures: Caring for People, Caring for Justice and Rights.” Oxfam Discussion Paper. Oxford, UK: Oxfam International. p10

137 Ibid. p10

over. As already noted, the Beijing+25 feminist convening in Mexico City in 2019 made clear that:<sup>138</sup>

*As we understand patriarchal structures and white supremacy to be central to the current functioning of neoliberal capitalism - evident in the mountain of unpaid care work on which corporate profits rest - the market cannot be an effective mechanism through which to correct gender, racial, or ethnic inequality. Instead, active policy interventions that seek to restructure the current, unequal state of the economy and society are fundamental to a feminist approach.*

As this discussion of economic contexts makes clear, the “current, unequal state of the economy and society” is not only destroying the planet and exploiting and killing women, girls and transgender and gender non-conforming people; the lives of cisgendered, heterosexual men and boys too are threatened in many ways by neoliberal capitalism, especially those marginalized by forces of economic and racial oppression. This raises the question of how gender transformative work with men and boys can help them to see their own interests in the systems change agenda being advanced by feminists across the world. There are related questions about how to change the gender narrative tying masculinity to waged work and how to develop an intersectional class analysis of

masculinities that can challenge politically regressive and reductive accounts of a ‘crisis’ in masculinity. There are questions too about how gender transformative work with men and boys might be used to build the power of organized labor to advance a radical and linked agenda for both economic and gender justice.

The work of developing policy advocacy and programming to promote and support boys’ and men’s greater involvement in the care economy and fostering care-giving norms must continue. There are questions about how such work can support a broader agenda for the redistribution of care work, not just within families but across society as a whole. And more fundamentally, a vision of sustainable and equitable life-making, collective care and social solidarity beyond the patriarchal masculine-feminine binary is needed. The related demands of climate justice, economic justice and gender justice require that those involved in the gender transformative work with men and boys build a closer dialogue with feminist groups and leaders active on issues of climate and economic justice rights, and racial and indigenous justice. Only through such collaborations can the ideological, institutional and individual changes needed to realize this vision be advanced. ■



04

# Social Contexts

Anti-Feminism,  
Normalized Violence  
and Politicized  
Religion



*Not only is it essential that we fight for the feminist cause for its own end, but as we are increasingly seeing, anti-feminism is acting as a prominent route into the wider far right for many, making it core to the mission of fighting hate and restoring hope in society more widely.*<sup>139</sup>

## 4.1

### **Trends in social attitudes on women's rights and LGBTQIA+ issues**

Over the last decade or more, gender transformative work with men and boys has increasingly been framed as challenging and changing “harmful norms of masculinity”. References to the need for social norms change recur frequently in project proposals, policy advocacy and funding requests associated with the field of gender justice work with men and boys. We believe that those involved in gender transformative work with men and boys should strengthen their efforts aiming to change discriminatory norms related to men's and boy's attitudes, responsibilities and roles, at country, regional and global levels.<sup>140</sup> A critical task, then, is to assess current trends in such norms, and how social attitudes on gender relations, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ issues are being shaped by the political and economic factors and forces discussed above.

One source of data is research on electoral support for authoritarian, patriarchal political ideologies, whose growing influence was discussed in Section 2. A recent and large-scale study of voting patterns for populist-authoritarian parties between 2000-2017 examined data from 39 European countries and the USA.<sup>141</sup> Norris and Inglehart argue that such support is best understood in terms

139 Murdoch, S. (2019) “Why Understanding The UK Anti-Feminist Movement Is Vital To Countering The Far Right.” Huffington Post [Online] [Accessed February 26]. p3

140 See <http://menengage.org/4451-2/>

141 Norris, Pippa and Ronald Inglehart. 2019. Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

of what they term “cultural backlash”. They conclude that gender conservatism and attachment to authoritarian values, rather than economic circumstances and grievances, account most accurately for voters’ support for far-right parties. In advancing this “cultural backlash” thesis to explain the growing support for populist-authoritarian parties, Norris and Inglehart emphasize the significance of generational divides. They note that older people with more authoritarian values drive voting for populist-authoritarian parties, and that they do so as a reaction to long-term trends in rising social liberalism in the population (but a slower shift in the electorate), which threatens socially conservative authoritarian voters and their identities around faith, family and nation. Importantly, they recognize that worsening economic conditions since 2008 have heightened this sense of threat to a ‘way of life’, and that far-right parties and leaders have exploited this opportunity with messaging that reinforces a sense of cultural crisis with respect to socially conservative ‘family values’.

There is also some evidence to suggest that this sense of crisis has resonated with men in particular. Acknowledging the generational dimension noted above, other studies have also highlighted the significance of gender for such far-right voting patterns. Surveying the available studies on electoral support for political parties in Europe, Coffé emphasizes that “[o]ne of the most consistent findings in the research on radical right voting has been the gender-specific profile of the radical right electorate,” with women “significantly underrepresented among radical right voters compared with men.”<sup>142</sup> Other studies portray a more complex picture of the gender dimensions of far-right support. Recent research has noted the growing numbers of women not only voting for far-right parties, but also joining as members.<sup>143</sup> Women in India have a significant presence in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh [National Patriotic Organization], a “uniformed, hard-line Hindu-nationalist cadre force [...] which also controls a wide array of civil-society organizations,

142 Coffé, Hilde. 2018. “Gender and the Radical Right.” Pp. 1-11 in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, edited by J. Rydgren. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p2

143 Bitzan, Renate. 2017. “Research on Gender and the Far Right in Germany since 1990: Developments, Findings, and Future Prospects.” Pp. 65-78 in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, edited by M. Köttig, R. Bitzan and A. Petö.



**More generally, large-scale surveys of social attitudes indicate that support for progress on gender equality may be weakening.**

known collectively as the Sangh.”<sup>144</sup>

More generally, large-scale surveys of social attitudes indicate that support for progress on gender equality may be weakening. A 2020 report based on the World Values Survey concludes that “[m]ore worrying, despite decades of progress in advancing women’s rights, bias against gender equality is increasing in some countries, with evidence of a backlash in attitudes among both men and women.”<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, “[s]urveys have shown that younger men may be even less committed to equality than their elders.”<sup>146</sup> This trend analysis is reinforced by studies examining men’s gender attitudes more specifically. In its early years, analyses of data from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) suggested a positive

trend. The background paper prepared for the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium in 2014 reported that IMAGES surveys from nine countries “found that men in all of the countries, with the exception of India, are generally supportive of gender equality” and that “younger generations of men are more supportive of gender equality and more likely to engage in household tasks than older generations.”<sup>147</sup>

Recent surveys present a different picture, however. Studies of men’s attitudes in Mexico, UK and USA suggest that younger men are not necessarily more supportive of gender equality than older men.<sup>148</sup> The results of an IMAGES study in the Middle East and North Africa in 2017 found that the majority of men surveyed in four countries support a wide array of inequitable, traditional attitudes. Perhaps more worryingly, in three of the four countries included in the study (Morocco, Palestine, and Egypt), younger men did not consistently show more equitable attitudes and key practices than their older counterparts.<sup>149</sup> A clear conclusion drawn from the study was that “too many men and boys in the region continue to uphold norms that perpetuate violence against

144 Vanaik, Achin. 2018. “India’s Two Hegemonies.” *New Left Review* 112(July-August):29-59. p30

145 UNDP. 2020. “Tackling Social Norms: A Game Changer for Gender Inequalities.” 2020 Human Development Perspectives. New York: United Nations Development Programme. p9

146 Ibid. p9

147 Ricardo, Christine. 2014. “Men, Masculinities, and Changing Power: A Discussion Paper on Engaging Men in Gender Equality from Beijing 1995 to 2015.” MenEngage Alliance and UN Women. p29

148 Heilman, B., Barker, G., and Harrison, A. (2017). *The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in the US, UK, and Mexico*. Washington, DC and London: Promundo-US and Unilever.

149 Promundo-US. 2017. “Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) - Middle East and North Africa.” UN Women and Promundo-US.

women or confine women to conventional restrictive roles, and they act on these attitudes in ways that cause harm to women, children, and themselves.”<sup>150</sup>

Explanations for this persistence of patriarchal attitudes and behaviors vary, but the research study noted that “[q]ualitative research findings with both Syrian refugees and Lebanese-born men suggest that financial hardship, conflict-related displacement, and unemployment play a role in men’s use of violence against their wives and children.”<sup>151</sup> Recent research in Uganda echoes this finding. A 2019 report on IMAGES data notes that:<sup>152</sup> IMAGES findings suggest limited support for, and perhaps some backlash against, ideas around gender equality in Central Uganda. Many men subscribe to a zero-sum view of equality – over half of male survey respondents said more rights for women mean that men lose out, and one in three agreed that when women work, they are taking jobs away from men.

Surveys of attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ people and their rights suggest a mixed picture with respect to SOGIESC issues in

the broader context of attitudes toward gender justice and sexual rights. The Pew Research Center, in a 2020 global study, reports encouragingly that in many



**Further evidence for a trend toward increasing opposition to gender equality, especially among men, may be found in the growing visibility of organizations self-identifying as working on “men’s rights”.**

countries, “there has been an increasing acceptance of homosexuality.”<sup>153</sup> But it also notes that despite major changes in laws and norms surrounding the issue of same-sex marriage and the rights of LGBTQIA+ people around the world, public opinion on the acceptance of homosexuality in society remains sharply divided by country, region and socio-economic developments. The study also reports that in most of the countries surveyed, there are no significant

150 MenEngage. 2017. “Discourses and Reflections from the Conference “Masculinities in the Arab World: Trajectories to Peace and Gender Equality.” Washington, DC: MenEngage Alliance, Promundo-US, ABAAD and UN Women Arab Regional Office. p6

151 Promundo-US. 2017. “Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (Images) - Middle East and North Africa.” UN Women and Promundo-US. p19

152 Vlahovicova, Kristina, Esther Spindler, Ruti Levtoy and Lilit Hakobyan. 2019. “Evolving Perspectives: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (Images) in Central Uganda.” Washington, DC: Promundo-US and International Center for Research on Women. p15

153 Poushter, Jacob and Nicholas Kent. 2020. “The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists.” Pew Research Center: Global Attitudes & Trends. Retrieved: August 9, 2020 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/>).

differences between men and women. But as it continues, “for all 12 countries surveyed where there was significant difference, women were more likely to approve of homosexuality than men.”<sup>154</sup> Recent research on the impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTQIA+ communities has found evidence of an increase in stigmatization, marginalization and violence, linked to long histories of LGBTQIA+ people being targeted for blame during emergency situations.<sup>155</sup>

Further evidence for a trend toward increasing opposition to gender equality, especially among men, may be found in the growing visibility of organizations self-identifying as working on “men’s rights”. Section 1.2.4 discusses the digital ecology of the men’s rights movement, collectively referred to as the “manosphere”, and its influence. Such activism is not new. For example, splits in the “men’s liberation” movement of the 1970s in the Global North meant that:<sup>156</sup>

*On the one hand, men’s rights organizations stressed the costs of narrow conceptions of masculinity to men, and either downplayed or angrily disputed feminist claims that patriarchy benefited men at women’s expense. On the other hand, a profeminist (sometimes called ‘anti-sexist’) men’s movement emphasized the primary importance of joining with women to do away with men’s institutionalized privileges.*

It is also important not to generalize, as men’s rights activism reflects, responds and replicates the political conditions and histories in which it operates, including manifestation of the same arguments around many contexts. In many parts of the Global North, such activism is also commonly linked with a defense of white supremacy, and a backlash against progress on anti-racism and immigrant rights.<sup>157</sup> There are commonalities, however, which it is useful to clarify. The trend toward an increasing visibility of men’s rights activism appears

154 Ibid.

155 See <https://outrightinternational.org/content/vulnerability-amplified-impact-covid-19-pandemic-lgbtq-people>

156 Messner, Michael A. 2016. “Forks in the Road of Men’s Gender Politics: Men’s Rights Vs Feminist Allies.” *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 5(2):6–20. p8

157 Ferber, Abby L. 2000. “Racial Warriors and Weekend Warriors.” *Men and Masculinities* 3(1):30–56.



**Significantly, this anti-feminism is not confined to men. Echoing the findings of recent research on far-right parties and organizations in Europe, whose female membership is growing, women appear to play important roles in the Indian men's rights movement.**

to indicate a reaction both to the changing political economy of gender, by which growing numbers of women are entering waged work and displacing men's breadwinner role in some cases, and to the hard-won feminist gains for women's rights in many countries. In her ethnographic study of the Indian men's rights movement (MRM), Basu explains that "the MRM has gradually increased in tempo, becoming most visible and vociferous since the mid-2000s under the banner organization: "Save Indian Family Foundation" (SIFF)."<sup>158</sup> She emphasizes the centrality of anti-feminism to this growth.<sup>159</sup>

*Men's rights activists (MRAs) and men's rights movements (MRMs) derive their identities in large part in reaction to women's liberation movements. They constitute themselves as being positioned against the foundational challenge of feminism, with feminists being the straw figures whose rhetoric and politics are the focus of the movement's action.*

Significantly, this anti-feminism is not confined to men. Echoing the findings of recent research on far-right parties and organizations in Europe, whose female membership is growing, women appear to play important roles in the Indian men's rights movement. "Women were the primary organizers in many cities", Basu notes, having "typically come to the movement in the shadow of criminal charges filed by their brothers' or sons' wives."<sup>160</sup> The anti-feminism of men's rights activism is often expressed in the language of male victimhood and vulnerability. Basu reports that such "evocations of vulnerability are prominent in the MRM: posters often depict poor and abandoned men, and men's suicide, depression, and unemployment is a primary preoccupation both in public speeches appealing for greater visibility and resources and in everyday counselling."<sup>161</sup> Such appeals to male victimhood are often highly emotive. Research on men's rights activism in Malta noted "how affective the men's rights movement has become, how it has co-opted the language of affect, emotion,

158 Basu, Srimati. 2016. "Looking through Misogyny: Indian Men's Rights Activists, Law, and Challenges for Feminism." *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 28(1):45-68. p52

159 Ibid. p46

160 Ibid. p54-55

161 Ibid. p66

feeling, and the personal being political to meet its own ends.”<sup>162</sup> In her study, Basu found that men’s rights groups were a powerful source of emotional support; “[m] any members emphatically asserted that their lives had changed for the better in gaining a rich sociality.”<sup>163</sup>

This shared feeling of victimhood unites men’s rights activists not only within but between countries. Often characterized as a feeling of “aggrieved entitlement” in reaction to men’s perceived loss of



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male privilege and authority,<sup>164</sup> Basu notes how this use of “claims of feeling disempowered echoes the trajectory of men’s groups in the United States, many

of whose leaders went from being in feminist movements to being rabid anti-feminists.”<sup>165</sup> Although addressing different issues in different countries, men’s rights activists organize around a shared concern about the loss of ‘traditional’ family values and structures, a loss they blame on both feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements. There is thus a sense of a transnational men’s rights movement, whose commonalities can be found:<sup>166</sup>

*In allegations that women’s violence matches men’s; in the denial, minimization, and excusing of violence; and in assertions that men face difficulties reporting domestic violence, that custodial decisions are biased against fathers, and that the state garners political popularity by supporting feminist arguments.*

For a global social change network focused on working with men and boys to transform patriarchal masculinities, the growing visibility and transnational character of anti-feminist men’s rights groups is a pressing concern for MenEngage Alliance. Confronting the anti-feminist messaging of men’s rights organizations, and working with both men and boys to support them in rejecting such messaging, is clearly a priority. To do so, however, requires a clear understanding

162 Allan, J. 2016. “Phallic Affect, or Why Men’s Rights Activists Have Feelings.” *Men and Masculinities* 19(1):22-41. p26

163 Basu 2016. p55

164 Kimmel, Michael S. 2017. *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*. New York, NY: Nation Books.

165 Basu. 2016. p66

166 Ibid. p51



of the sophistication of both the messaging and organization of men's rights activism. Its explicit use of emotional language of victimhood has already been noted. Basu also emphasizes the extent to which men's rights activism appropriates feminist frames of vulnerability and persecution for anti-feminist purposes, "using discourses of feminism and human rights as strategic currencies" in order to "compete for resources and visibility".<sup>167</sup> In this respect, it is helpful to draw on theories of social movement organizing in order to understand and confront the ways in which men's rights movement strategies:<sup>168</sup>

fit squarely within the three prominent "repertoires of contention" used by social movements pertaining to gender: the use of "new political opportunities and threats," "shifts in mobilizing structures of communication, [and] coordination," and the "reframing of claims, identities, and culturally resonant meanings."

This analysis, in turn, suggests a need to be alert to men's rights organizations' use of political opportunities in their own contexts as well as their "structures of communication", and thus to be ready and able to contest the "reframing of claims, identities, and culturally resonant meanings" of masculinity deployed by the men's rights movement. It also highlights the need for those involved in gender transformative work with men and boys to step up on practice of solidarity with feminist and LGBTQIA+ activists and movements, who are the direct targets of attack by men's rights organizations. Too often, statements about such solidarity have not been matched by practical action. As one feminist activist put it, in her review of an earlier draft of this Discussion Paper:<sup>169</sup>

*For feminists, we are always under attack and it's not simply that men's rights activists exist, it's that we can't close our eyes and rely on male allies to lead the resistance to those groups, however that happens and whatever that means, but certainly in the sense of taking the risks we do. I simply do not see male allies taking the risks*

<sup>167</sup> Basu. 2016. p50

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. p53

<sup>169</sup> Personal communication by Dr. Gabrielle Jamela Hosein, Head, Institute for Gender and Development Studies, The University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago



*we do in relation to men's rights groups and that, for me, knowing that those men are not out there, regardless of how much we train or fund or facilitate or give ideas to or guide or whatever, is huge. That's what I want, male allies that will hold the men's rights movement accountability so that women don't have to.*

## 4.2 Normalized gender-based violence

One of the most dangerous aspects of men's rights movement messaging is its minimization of violence against women and girls, and the often related claim that violence against men and boys is of equivalent concern. Yet, as decades of research make clear, violence against women and girls is widespread and normalized to an extraordinary degree in many societies. Approximately one in three women around the world experience physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetimes. Nearly four in every ten female homicides are committed by an intimate partner, and upwards of 50% of children experience violence, often in settings presumed to be safe: the home and at school.<sup>170</sup> Globally, 18% of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15–49 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of a current or previous partner in the previous 12 months.<sup>171</sup>

Such high levels of intimate partner violence serve to maintain men's control over women's lives both directly, through the fact of the violence, and indirectly, through women's fear of men's violence. In this sense, the effects of domestic violence are not confined to the home. Indeed, it is also the case, though still rarely foregrounded, that when the personal histories of those who commit terrorist violence are known, they frequently include histories of perpetrating violence against intimate partners. As Díaz and Valji emphasize:<sup>172</sup>



**Such high levels of intimate partner violence serve to maintain men's control over women's lives both directly, through the fact of the violence, and indirectly, through women's fear of men's violence**

170 Peterman, Amber, Megan O'Donnell, Karen Devries and Alessandra Guedes. 2020. "Violence in Times of Coronavirus—the Ugly Truth." Think Global Health. Retrieved: August 8, 2020 (<https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/violence-times-coronavirus-ugly-truth>).

171 For the latest data on violence against women, go to [https://www.who.int/health-topics/violence-against-women#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/violence-against-women#tab=tab_1)

172 Díaz, Pablo Castillo and Nahla Valji. 2019. "Symbiosis of Misogyny and Violent Extremism: New Understandings and Policy Implications." *Journal of International Affairs* 72(2):37-56. p44

*One can find examples of expressed misogyny or domestic violence in the personal histories of nearly all the perpetrators of the worst terrorist incidents and mass killings in Western countries in recent years, which is remarkable because neither misogynist acts or expressions nor violence against women are typically reported and exhaustively documented.*



**Taking these statistics as a whole, two facts are striking: how common it is that women and girls experience violence, and that this violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men**

They note that even though information about the personal histories of the members of the most prominent terrorist groups in the world is not available, when “we do have this information, in the case of individual perpetrators that have lived in Western countries and conduct their attacks there, the pattern that emerges is exactly the same.”<sup>173</sup>

In the weeks following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, alarming increases in violence against women and children were reported, linked to the lockdown measures imposed by many governments. In Chihuahua State, Mexico there was a reported 65% increase in femicides between March and April 2020.<sup>174</sup> After the International Rescue Committee opened a GBV Hotline in Lebanon, the number of women and girls seeking support more than doubled between March and April compared to the first two months of the year.<sup>175</sup> UNFPA has warned that an additional 15 million cases of gender-based violence (GBV) will occur every three months that the lockdown continues.<sup>176</sup> But COVID-19 and the public health measures imposed in response, are not the cause of this spike in violence against women and children; they merely expose and worsen the underlying inequalities that fuel this violence.

Taking these statistics as a whole, two facts are striking: how common it is that women and girls experience violence, and that this violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men. This evidence of the normalization of male violence only reaffirms the conclusion of the UN Secretary-General’s 2006 In-depth

173 Ibid. p45

174 See <https://www.rescue.org/topic/coronavirus-response>

175 Ibid.

176 See <https://www.unfpa.org/press/new-unfpa-projections-predict-calamitous-impact-womens-health-covid-19-pandemic-continues>

study on all forms of violence against women: “The pervasiveness of violence against women across the boundaries of nation, culture, race, class and religion points to its roots in patriarchy - the systemic domination of women by men.”<sup>177</sup> Legislative progress on violence against women and girls, especially in relation to domestic violence, has been made in many countries. But it remains true that men’s violence against women and girls is normal, both in terms of its frequency and the impunity with which it is committed. A large-scale study in the Asia-Pacific region not only revealed high rates of self-reported violence by men but also that 72–97% did not experience any legal consequences.<sup>178</sup> Such persistent impunity for male violence, has if anything, been reinforced by the rise to power of openly misogynistic political leadership in a number of countries. The Mexico City feminist convening in 2019 emphasized that “[d]ue to a clear rise in sexism and misogyny, violence against women has been on the increase, including extreme forms of violence such as disappearances, torture, and feminicides, which are widespread and happen with alarming impunity.”<sup>179</sup>

It is this normalization of and impunity for men’s violence against women, girls

and gender non-conforming people that the #MeToo movement has exposed once again. As story after story made clear, such violence is everyday and everywhere; not confined to the home, but in the street, the workplace, in places of care and support and in places of detention. While much of the focus on the “shadow pandemic” of gender-based violence associated with COVID-19 has been on violence in the home, here too a broader perspective is required. The emotional stress that the pandemic places on patients, their relatives and other healthcare workers has increased the risk of violence. Globally, women account for 70% of the health and social care workforce. Research before the epidemic found that most violence is targeted at female nurses in emergency departments with long waiting times, in isolated places at patients’ homes, or in geriatric or psychiatric departments. There are anecdotal reports of racialized harassment that people, especially women, of East Asian appearance have faced since COVID-19 was first reported in Wuhan, China. Women in insecure employment, including migrant workers and street-based sex workers have faced increased risks of coercive, violent and exploitative behavior. Fears have been raised in several countries about gendered State

177 United Nations (2006). In-depth study on all forms of violence against women: Report of the Secretary-General. New York: United Nations General Assembly: Sixty-first session.p28 [para 69]

178 Fulu, E., X. Warner, S. Miedema, R. Jewkes, T. Roselli and J. Lang (2013). Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Summary Report of Quantitative Findings from the United Nations Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok: UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV.

179 Anon. 2019. p8

violence during the pandemic, including violence against women detained as undocumented migrants by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Reports suggest that women, as well as gender and sexual minorities, may be at increased risk of different forms of violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse, in refugee camps and IDP settlements dealing with outbreaks of COVID-19.<sup>180</sup>



**Men's violence against women and girls is structured by patriarchal relations of power, which themselves are shaped by economic exploitation, racialized oppression, and other intersecting hierarchies of power**

As the above examples make clear, men's violence against women and girls is structured by patriarchal relations of power, which themselves are shaped by economic exploitation, racialized oppression, and other intersecting hierarchies of power. The feminists gathered at the Mexico City convening

noted that "[a]lthough we are seeing an unprecedented level of awareness globally due to mobilization by women survivors of different forms of violence, violence has persisted and even deepened as the structural issues related to women's oppression have not been seriously addressed."<sup>181</sup> These structural issues are intimately connected to the political and economic systems discussed in previous sections.

Such an analysis complicates the struggles for justice which feminists have waged for decades in confronting the pervasive violence that women and girls face. As the Mexico City convening also emphasized, "women, gender non-conforming people, and Women's Human Rights Defenders" are increasingly targeted by "the expansion of repressive measures by state and non-state actors", and that "violence against these groups [has] become increasingly normalized by authoritarian regimes and fascist actors in different regions."<sup>182</sup> Indeed, "public security forces are some of the biggest perpetrators of violence against women and other marginalised groups."<sup>183</sup> For many women and girls, then, the State is an agent of violence against them, rather than a source of justice for them.

180 Fraser, Erika. 2020. "Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Violence against Women and Girls." VAWG Helpdesk Research Report No. 284. London, UK: Department for International Development.

181 Anon 2019. p8

182 Ibid. p8

183 Ibid. p4

This understanding of the systemic nature of gender-based violence makes clear that gender transformative work with men and boys must be about systems change, at institutional and ideological levels, as well as efforts to change individual men's attitudes and behaviors. Díaz and Valji insist on the misogynistic character of this gender-based violence as being ideological, rather than a matter of psychology or culture, because “focusing on misogyny puts the emphasis on the ideology itself, rather than on the circumstances that purportedly affect men's sense of identity.”<sup>184</sup> The political implications of this framing are unequivocal, understanding “misogyny as a political phenomenon whose purpose is to police and enforce women's subordination.”<sup>185</sup>

This understanding also highlights the limitations of a “social norms” framework, commonly applied in gender transformative work with men and boys, which addresses such norms as determinants of individual behavior rather than as expressions of systemic power relations. Indeed, there is growing concern within the GBV prevention field that norms-based approaches, if they address norms from a social psychological perspective as determinants of individual violence, understate the need to address the economic conditions and political forces shaping the normalization of patriarchal social relations and the many forms of violence underpinning them. A recent review of violence prevention community activism states that:<sup>186</sup>

*There is an emerging recognition that norms-based strategies may not be sufficient to reduce violence, because social norms are just a part of the portfolio of drivers of violence in any setting. Social norms change may be more effective when embedded as a violence against all women and girls reduction strategy in programmes that address multiple drivers of violence.*

This understanding of the systemic nature of gender-based violence, structured by intersecting hierarchies of power, also directs attention

184 Díaz and Valji. 2019. p41

185 Ibid. p49

186 Jewkes, Rachel, Erin Stern and Leane Ramsoomar. 2019. “Preventing Violence against Women and Girls: Community Activism Approaches to Shift Harmful Gender Attitudes, Roles and Social Norms - Evidence Review.” Pretoria, South Africa. p3

to the very different experiences of and relationships to such violence which different groups of men have, based on their differing positions within these



**This understanding of the systemic nature of gender-based violence, structured by intersecting hierarchies of power, also directs attention to the very different experiences of and relationships to such violence which different groups of men have, based on their differing positions within these hierarchies.**

hierarchies. The patriarchal violence that maintains the “systemic domination of women by men” also maintains the cisgendered, heteronormative gender binary that structures gender relations in so many societies. The recent report by the UN’s Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity

outlines the extent of violence against LGBTQIA+ communities, including the many men and male-identified people within them.<sup>187</sup> Once again, this violence is everyday and everywhere.

The report notes the prevalence of homophobic and transphobic violence in public space, “as a sanction of a person’s actions to publicly express certain sexual orientations and gender identities perceived by the agent of violence and discrimination to be transgressive.”<sup>188</sup> Homophobic and transphobic ideologies are pervasive in many societies; “[i]ncitement to violence, hatred, exclusion and discrimination are also aided by representations in media and cultural channels and lead to increased psychological distress for LGBT persons.”<sup>189</sup> Stonewall (the UK’s largest LGBTQIA+ rights charity) surveyed 5,000 people across the country in 2017, and found that one in five LGBTQIA+ people had experienced an anti-LGBTQIA+ hate crime or incident in the previous 12 months. The rate was even higher when examining the figure for transgender people only, with two in five trans people having experienced a hate crime or incident in the previous 12 months.<sup>190</sup> In Jamaica, a 2016 study of 316 LGBTQIA+ people found that

187 United Nations. 2019. “Protection against Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Note by the Secretary-General.” United Nations General Assembly: Seventy-fourth session - Item 72 (b) of the preliminary list “Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms”. New York, NY: United Nations.

188 Ibid. p9

189 Ibid. p10

190 Gitari, Eric and Mark Walters. 2020. “Hate Crimes against the Lgbt Community in the Commonwealth: A Situational

24% of respondents had been threatened with sexual violence in the previous five years on the basis of their real or



**Irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity, men and boys living and/or working in all-male environments can be subject to different forms of physical, psychological and sexual violence, whose function is to assert and maintain gender hierarchies amongst men.**

perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, while 32% had been threatened with physical violence.<sup>191</sup>

The UN Independent Expert's report also highlighted the many other factors that structure violence against LGBTQIA+ people; for example, LGBTQIA+ youth "are disproportionately affected by homelessness which results from religious and cultural intolerance that

may include sexual and other violence, as well as socioeconomic deprivation."<sup>192</sup>

The movements of people produced by oppressive political and economic conditions also increases vulnerability to homophobic and transphobic violence:<sup>193</sup>

The structural vulnerability of LGBT persons may be compounded by their status as migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. As they flee discrimination and violence at home, they may be at particular risk of violence, abuse and exploitation at all stages of their journey and at the hands of immigration officers, traffickers and smugglers.

Irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity, men and boys living and/or working in all-male environments can be subject to different forms of physical, psychological and sexual violence, whose function is to assert and maintain gender hierarchies amongst men. Examples include violence between prisoners and between prisoners and custodial staff,<sup>194</sup> and the violence that male recruits face when joining military and paramilitary forces.<sup>195</sup>

Medical and psychological support

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Analysis." London, UK: The Human Dignity Trust.

191 Ibid

192 United Nations. 2019. p12

193 Ibid. p14

194 Nascimento, Marcos Antonio Ferreira do, Anna Paula Uziel and Jimena de Garay Hernández. 2018. "Young Men in Juvenile Detention Centers in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil: Gender, Sexuality, Masculinity and Health Implications." *Cad Saude Publica* 34(2):1-7.

195 Ricardo, Christine and Gary Barker. 2008. "Men, Masculinities, Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Violence: A Literature Review and Call for Action." Washington DC: Promundo and MenEngage.

services for survivors of different forms of gender-based violence continue to be under-funded and need strengthening and scaling up in most countries. Male survivors often face further barriers to accessing such services due to the stigma attached to male victimization. There are rare but notable examples of men organizing for self-care, such as the Men of Hope Refugee Association Uganda (MOHRAU), an organization run by and for male survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>196</sup> A continuing challenge for the field of gender transformative work with men and boys on patriarchal masculinities is to respond to the ways in which the violence of such masculinities harms people of differing gender identities, without at the same time inadvertently reinforcing the messaging on male victimhood used by Men's Rights movements.

### 4.3 Politicized religion and patriarchal backlash

The political use of religious doctrine to assert and maintain patriarchal masculinities has a long history; such politicized religion seems ever more central to the patriarchal backlash discussed earlier. The Mexico City feminist convening in 2019 emphasized the degree to which “the human rights of women, transgender, and gender non-conforming identities, adolescents, and girls are routinely violated and the target of intense attacks by religious institutions and authoritarian governments.”<sup>197</sup> A 2020 study warns that “[a]ntifeminist mobilisation is growing in the United Nations”, led “by a coalition of certain post- Soviet, Catholic, and Islamic states”.<sup>198</sup> The study notes that uniting “them is the aim of restoring the ‘natural family’ and opposing ‘gender ideology’”, and that their ideological commitment to

196 Edström, Jerker, Christopher Dolan, Thea Shahrokh and Onen David. 2016. “Therapeutic Activism: Men of Hope Refugee Association Uganda Breaking the Silence over Male Rape in Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.” Brighton, UK and Kampala, Uganda: Institute of Development Studies and Refugee Law Project.

197 Anon. 2019. p8

198 Čupać, Jelena and Irem Ebetürk. 2020. “The Personal Is Global Political: The Antifeminist Backlash in the United Nations.” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 22(4):1-13. p1



patriarchal 'family values' draws heavily on religious teachings, both Christian and Islamic.<sup>199</sup> Elsewhere, this commitment is also reinforced by appeals to Hindu and Buddhist doctrine.<sup>200</sup>

The significance of religiosity in linking social conservatism with political authoritarianism, and the gender dimensions of such links, merits closer examination. We know that "[s]pirituality, religion or faith-based beliefs significantly influence the lives of more than 85% of the global population" and that such "belief systems and associated practices can, in turn, strongly influence believers' norms and value systems, both positively and negatively."<sup>201</sup> There is also some evidence to suggest the increasing influence of religious beliefs and practices. A 2019 study reports that more than half those surveyed in Indonesia (83%), the Philippines (58%) and India (54%) believe that religion has a bigger impact on their nation today than it did 20 years ago.<sup>202</sup> Seven-in-ten or more people in all three of these countries say religion is very important in their lives. Meanwhile, a 65% majority in Nigeria thinks religion plays a more important role in their country, while 60% of Kenyans say the same. Notably, large majorities in these countries (96% and 93%, respectively) say religion is very important in their lives.

Such reports of the importance of religion do not necessarily suggest an increased commitment to either social conservatism or political authoritarianism. The meanings of religious teaching and practice vary greatly, not least with respect to gender roles and relations. MenEngage Alliance members have found that "an increasing engagement between gender equality organizations and activists and faith-based communities or leaders has become common."<sup>203</sup>



**Such reports of the importance of religion do not necessarily suggest an increased commitment to either social conservatism or political authoritarianism**

199 Ibid. p1

200 Vanaik, Achin. 2018. "India's Two Hegemonies." *New Left Review* 112(July-August):29-59.

201 MenEngage. 2016. "Faith-Based Approaches to Transforming Masculinities for Gender Justice & Equality: A Two-Day Consultation Summary Report." Washington DC: MenEngage Alliance. p4

202 Poushter, Jacob and Janell Fetterolf. 2019. "How People around the World View Religion's Role in Their Countries." Pew Research Center: Global Attitudes & Trends. Retrieved: September 12, 2020 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/04/22/how-people-around-the-world-view-religions-role-in-their-countries/>).

203 MenEngage. 2016. p4

Through this engagement it is clear that, “[w]hile a critical evaluation of the roles played by faith-based belief systems in shaping gender norms is essential, it is also important to work with people of faith to promote positive interpretations of spiritual, faith and religious values, supportive of parity and justice.”<sup>204</sup>



**Trends in religiosity must be understood then in relation to the political agendas of organized religious groups, whose institutional arrangements and ideological commitments give them the character of social movements**

But it is also clear that such gender transformative work with religious and faith leaders and organizations must take account of the multiple roles played by such organizations in people’s lives, and what this means in terms of their potential

for politicization. In many urban settings in both the Global South and Global North, religious organizations have stepped into the void left by the neoliberal State and its withdrawal from “social provisioning”. In doing so, religious organizations provide a range of social welfare and health services as well as a ‘home’ within which to nurture both social solidarity and political grievance. In this way, religious organizations develop a social legitimacy, as a foundation on which to mobilize communities around particular political visions and programs. Evidence of such dynamics has been documented in a number of and diverse countries, including Tunisia,<sup>205</sup> India,<sup>206</sup> Thailand, the UK<sup>207</sup> and the USA<sup>208</sup>.

Trends in religiosity must be understood then in relation to the political agendas of organized religious groups, whose institutional arrangements and ideological commitments give them the character of social movements. As Davis suggests, “populist Islam and Pentecostal Christianity (and in Bombay, the cult of Shivaji) occupy a social space analogous to that of early twentieth-century socialism and anarchism.”<sup>209</sup> The gender politics of such movements

204 Ibid. p4

205 Lamloum, Olfa. 2016. “Politics on the Margins in Tunisia: Vulnerable Young People in Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen.” London: International Alert.

206 Vanaik. 2018.

207 Jawad, Rana. 212. “The contemporary British context: social and policy profiles in relation to religion.” Religion and faith-based welfare. Bristol University Press

208 Cooper, Melinda. 2017. “Theology of the Social: The Rise of Faith-Based Welfare.”. Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism. The MIT Press; Zone Books

209 Davis, Mike. 2004. “Planet of the Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat.” New Left Review 26(March-

vary, historically and geographically, but recent years have seen increasing a resurgent alignment between socially conservative religious movements and authoritarian political forces, centered on a patriarchal conception of the social order. The campaign against “gender ideology” championed by Orbán, Bolsonaro and other authoritarian leaders was initiated by Catholic conservatives in the 1990s, who argued that the concept of ‘gender’ undermines the traditional, heteronormative, and patriarchal family structure, and thereby the social stability of the nation.

Studies of ethnonationalist parties and forces in many parts of the world highlight the use of religion in connecting male supremacy with white/majority supremacist ideologies. The figure of the male protector, who must defend the Hindu nation and its families from the sexualized threat of the Muslim ‘invader’, is a central motif of Hindutva. This is the Hindu nationalist ideology of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and of the right-wing, Hindu nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organization the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which provides the organizational support for his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Commenting on far-right political forces in Europe, Fekete notes that the “most successful hard right political crusaders against Islam and Muslims, such as Matteo Salvini in Italy and Viktor Orbán in Hungary, claim to be staunch defenders of Europe’s Christian tradition,” and that “[j]ust like Bolsonaro in Brazil, who has declared that he is fulfilling the mission of God, Salvini is attempting to mould an aggressive Catholicism around a hyper-masculinised personality cult.”<sup>210</sup>

That the authoritarian political turn in many countries is drawing on a religiously-grounded patriarchal social conservatism is clear and threatens a broad progressive agenda. As Beinart suggests:<sup>211</sup>

*At stake are advances made to legalize same-sex marriage, achieve gender wage parity, access contraception and abortion*

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April):5-34. p30

210 Fekete, Liz. 2019. “White Supremacy, Racial Patriarchy: Two Sides of the Same Coin.” Verso Blog. Retrieved: September 8, 2020 (<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4420-white-supremacy-racial-patriarchy-two-sides-of-the-same-coin>).

211 Beinart, Peter. 2019. “The New Authoritarians Are Waging War on Women.” The Atlantic January-February.

*services, balance care work with greater feminization of the economy, and end discrimination of LGBTQI persons. Importantly, challenging the far-right's war on gender is also central to advancing racial justice, ensuring the rights of refugees and migrants, and promoting inclusive societies.*

This threat must, then, be of central concern to “progressive forces” in their efforts to support women’s rights and LGBTQIA+ movements. Of particular concern must be the ways in which this religiously-grounded patriarchal social conservatism deepens the normalization of misogyny, homo/trans-phobia and violence against women and girls as well as LGBTQIA+ communities.

#### 4.4 Implications for transforming patriarchal masculinities

The increase in misogynistic public speech, not least from authoritarian political leaders, challenges organizations doing gender transformative work with men and boys to speak out more publicly against this normalization of misogyny. So too is it urgent to develop contextually-specific analyses of and responses to Men’s Rights movements, both at the level of media communications and public messaging, and in terms of working directly with men

and boys to support them in rejecting Men’s Rights propaganda. As allies to feminist movements, those involved in gender transformative work with men and boys have an important role to play to generate and share lessons and tools that can enhance such responses to Men’s Rights organizing. Part of this work will also involve continuing to build relationships and dialog with religious groups and leaders, to enlist their support in countering misogyny and patriarchal masculinities.

As this forgoing overview of social contexts suggests, any work to challenge the normalization of patriarchal social relations, and the gender-based violence associated with them, must analyze trends in “harmful gender norms” in the context of a resurgent social conservatism, often religiously informed, which is itself harnessed by specific political forces in particular economic conditions. This is to say that a social movement perspective on the problem of “harmful social norms” is needed, both in order to better understand such social conservatism in terms of the dynamics of regressive social movements and to better identify the opportunities to build coalitions of progressive forces to counter them. ■

# 05 Digital Contexts

Media, Attention  
Economies and the  
Manosphere

*The technological affordances of social media are especially well suited to the amplification of new articulations of aggrieved manhood.*<sup>212</sup>

## 5.1 Media technologies and patriarchal masculinities

The political, economic and social contexts discussed above have all been shaped by, and in turn shaped, the pace and nature of technological change, especially in relation to digital communications. As this section will discuss, rapid technological change is affecting expressions and experiences of patriarchal masculinities. This means that gender transformative work with men and boys must develop a better understanding of the technological contexts in which it is operating, and both the challenges and opportunities created by technological change.



**Anti-patriarchal work with men and boys has long had an interest in the role of media and communication technologies in maintaining patriarchal norms, and especially its role in socializing young men into patriarchal masculinities**

Anti-patriarchal work with men and boys has long had an interest in the role of media and communication technologies in maintaining patriarchal norms, and especially its role in socializing young men into patriarchal masculinities.<sup>213</sup> Much of this work has focused on issues of media literacy in relation to the objectification of women and girls across many forms of media (from TV shows, to music lyrics, to advertising campaigns), and the role played by representations of violence (in movies, TV and computer gaming) in desensitizing boys and young men to patriarchal violence.<sup>214</sup>

More recently, gender justice advocates have highlighted the impact of digital technologies in deepening the marginalization of women,

212 Ging, Debbie. 2017. "Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere." *Men and Masculinities*: 1-20. p16

213 Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. 2020. "If He Can See It, Will He Be It?" Emmitsburg, MD: Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, Promundo-US and the Kering Foundation.

214 Larasi, Marai. 2012. "Media as a Site to Prevent Violence against Girls and Women." Pp. 1-12 in UN Women In cooperation with ESCAP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO Expert Group Meeting: Prevention of violence against women and girls Bangkok, Thailand 17-20 September 2012.

girls and LGBTQIA+ communities. In 2019, the number of internet users worldwide stood at 4.13 billion, which means that more than half of the global population is currently connected to the world wide web.<sup>215</sup> The number of smartphone users worldwide today surpasses three billion and is forecast to further grow by several hundred million in the next few years.<sup>216</sup>

But gender-based barriers continue to constrain women's access to and uptake of this digital connectivity. The Association for Progressive Communications, in its recent submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, notes that "[w]hether in terms of access, affordability, meaningful connectivity or digital literacy, women's overall participation in the digital space remains disproportionately limited."<sup>217</sup>

The Web Foundation reports that men remain 21% more likely to be online than women, rising to 52% in the world's least developed countries (LDCs).<sup>218</sup> Once online, research suggests that women are 30-50% less likely than men to use Internet

access to increase income or participate in public life.<sup>219</sup> Such barriers continue to slow progress toward SDG 9, which set a target of universal and affordable access to the internet in least developed countries by 2020, and the "leave no-one behind" commitment of Agenda 2030 more generally.

At the same time, as a medium of both interpersonal communication and public discourse, the internet both reinforces and expands the operations of oppressive behaviors and hierarchies. In 2015, the UN Broadband Commission reported that women were 27 times more likely than men to be targeted by tech-related violence.<sup>220</sup> A 2018 report by OHCHR emphasizes that women and girls "face online forms and manifestations of violence that are part of the continuum of multiple, recurring and interrelated forms of gender-based violence against women."<sup>221</sup> This experience of online violence and digital exclusion is also affected by "intersectional forms of

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215 <https://www.statista.com/topics/1145/internet-usage-worldwide/>

216 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/330695/number-of-smartphone-users-worldwide/>

217 APC. 2020. "Covid-19 and the Increase of Domestic Violence against Women: A Submission from the Association for Progressive Communications to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences." Association for Progressive Communications.

218 <https://webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-gender-gap-in-internet-access-using-a-women-centred-method/>

219 Web Foundation. 2015. "Women's Rights Online: Translating Access into Empowerment." Geneva: World Wide Web Foundation.

220 UN Broadband Commission. 2015. "Cyber Violence against Women and Girls: A World-Wide Wake-up Call." New York: UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development Working Group on Broadband and Gender.

221 OHCHR. 2018. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences on Online Violence against Women and Girls from a Human Rights Perspective." Human Rights Council Thirty-eighth session, 18 June–6 July 2018. Agenda item 3: Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. Geneva, Switzerland: UN Human Rights Council. p5



**A growing body of evidence shows that the impacts of digital misogyny and online violence are limiting women's participation in public and political life**

discrimination based on a number of other factors, such as race, ethnicity, caste, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, abilities, age, class, income, culture, religion, and urban or rural setting."<sup>222</sup> As the report continues:<sup>223</sup>

*It is therefore important to acknowledge that the Internet is being used in a broader environment of widespread and systemic structural discrimination and gender-based violence against women and girls, which frame their access to and use of the Internet and other ICT. Emerging forms of ICT have facilitated new types of gender-based violence and gender inequality in access to technologies, which hinder women's and girls' full enjoyment of their human rights and their ability to achieve gender equality.*

A growing body of evidence shows that the impacts of digital misogyny and online violence are limiting women's participation in public and political life.<sup>224</sup> Women Human Rights Defenders continue to face online violence and harassment for their political activism on issues ranging from climate justice to sexual and reproductive rights.<sup>225</sup> Recent research with college-aged women participating in online political discussions in Colombia, Kenya and Indonesia found that they experienced similar types of violence including insults and hate speech, embarrassment and reputational risk, physical threats, and sexualized misrepresentation.<sup>226</sup> The OHCHR report notes that:<sup>227</sup> Women human rights defenders, journalists and politicians are directly targeted, threatened, harassed or even killed for their work. They receive online threats, generally of a misogynistic nature, often sexualized and specifically gendered. The violent nature of these threats often leads to self-censorship.

Not only do digital misogyny and online violence have political effects;

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. p8

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. p5

<sup>224</sup> <https://www.apc.org/en>

<sup>225</sup> Anon. 2019.

<sup>226</sup> NDI. 2019. "Tweets That Chill: Analyzing Online Violence against Women in Politics." Washington, DC: National Democratic Institute.

<sup>227</sup> OHCHR. 2018. p8



they serve specific political purposes and interests. Recognizing that digital technologies facilitate not merely interpersonal communication but political speech and action means that the political forces at work on the internet must be acknowledged.

## 5.2

### Attention economies of platform capitalism

Together with this important emphasis on the ways in which an ideological commitment to misogyny and male supremacy is manifest online, it is also important to understand the logic of exploitation and oppression organizing the operations of internet platforms themselves. There is a growing recognition that the ownership structures and network effects of “platform capitalism” concentrate power in unprecedented ways. The world’s richest corporations (including Google, Amazon and Facebook) have built their business empires on digital platforms, marketing them as open, innovative and liberating.

Yet, as Easterling suggests, a “platform celebrating its broad reach, open access, and free circulation of information within an internet of things may also become a network concentrating authority in an organization with a highly centralized disposition.”<sup>228</sup> A 2018 report by DfID on Doing Development in a Digital World warns that the “benefits of the internet are also being accompanied by new risks of harmful concentration and monopoly, rising inequality, and state and corporate use of digital technologies to control rather than empower citizens.”<sup>229</sup> The lockdown measures imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic heightened awareness not only of the centrality of digital technologies to the functioning of everyday life in many societies, but also the vulnerabilities this creates to both State and

228 Easterling, Keller. 2014. *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*. London and New York: Verso.

229 DfID. 2018. “Digital Strategy 2018-2020: Doing Development in a Digital World.” London: Department for International Development.



**At worst, the very possibility of rational public debate and decision-making is undermined by manipulation and exploitation of communication infrastructures, and the increasingly hidden nature of decision-making by automated systems and their algorithms**

orporate control and surveillance.<sup>230</sup>

At best, this concentration of power results in a new paternalism, in which the freedoms and limitations of online speech, which increasingly is the medium of political life in many societies, are determined by platform content moderators rather than the rights of the citizen, or indeed the sovereignty of political institutions. At worst, the very possibility of rational public debate and decision-making is undermined by manipulation and exploitation of communication infrastructures, and the increasingly hidden nature of decision-making by automated systems and their algorithms. As a 2018 report on the challenges of governance and accountability in the contemporary era makes clear, in “the increasingly noisy and complex digital landscape, the nature of political dialogue is open to new forms of manipulation.”<sup>231</sup> The term agnotology has been coined to refer to this use of manipulation to sew disinformation and create doubt and suspicion of previously accepted facts. As has been argued, “[w]hether we’re talking about the erasure of history or the undoing of scientific knowledge, agnotology is a tool of oppression by the powerful.”<sup>232</sup>

Such a tool is designed into the commercial logic of platform capitalism. Where communication technologies used to be understood in terms of their capacity to create and share meaning, the digital communications of platform capitalism are fundamentally not about the articulation of meaning, but keeping our attention in order to extract and exploit our data. As Seymour explains:<sup>233</sup>

*On social media platforms, the incentive is to constantly produce more information: a perpetual motion machine, harnessed to passions*

230 Zuboff, Shoshana. 2019. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs.

231 McGee, Rosie, Duncan Edwards, Colin Anderson, Hannah Hudson and Francesca Feruglio. 2018. “Appropriating Technology for Accountability: Messages from Making All Voices Count.” *Making All Voices Count Research Report*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. p23

232 boyd, danah. 2019. “Agnotology and Epistemological Fragmentation.” *Data & Society Research Institute*. Retrieved: August 3, 2020 (<https://points.datasociety.net/agnotology-and-epistemological-fragmentation-56aa3c509c6b>).

233 Seymour, Richard. 2019. *The Twittering Machine*. London: The Indigo Press. p160

*of which the machine knows nothing. This production is not for the purpose of making meaning. It is for the purpose of producing effects on users that keep us hooked.*

If the “algorithm is there to keep users



**If the “algorithm is there to keep users glued to the screen with content likely to be addictive,” the evidence suggests that the more provocative the content, the more addictive it is.**

glued to the screen with content likely to be addictive,”<sup>234</sup> the evidence suggests that the more provocative the content, the more addictive it is. Whether provoking outrage or delight, misogyny and other forms of oppressive online speech “keep users glued to the screen.” In 2017, one analysis found that Trump alone was worth about \$2.5 billion to Twitter, a fifth of its share value at the time.<sup>235</sup> The proliferation of conspiracy memes

and conspiracist thinking online is the product of this commercial logic and the crisis of democratic decision-making and accountability it has helped to fuel. For Jameson, conspiracy “is the poor person’s cognitive mapping in the postmodern age,”<sup>236</sup> an age characterized, since the onset of neoliberal economic reforms from the early 1980s onwards, by a technocratic hollowing out of democratic processes.<sup>237</sup>

The business models of platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are organized by a “competitive structure, pitting all against all in a ceaseless struggle for likes” which “creates a culture of social Darwinism in which the ‘strongest’ prevail; and its consequent promotion of hierarchies, or personality cults, inhibits egalitarian discourse while inciting would-be Führers.”<sup>238</sup> Equally, the conspiracism fostered by platform capitalism has found one of its clearest expressions in the “red pill” meme, whose cross-cultural appeal can, in part, be explained by the global success of The Matrix movies. This “red pill” meme encourages men to see through the illusions of contemporary life:<sup>239</sup>

234 Ibid. p169

235 Ibid. p127

236 Jameson, Frederic. 1990. “Cognitive Mapping.” Pp. 347-60 in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

237 Brown, Wendy. 2019. *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*. New York: Columbia University Press.

238 Eagleton, Oliver. 2019. “Mind Forged Manacles.” *New Left Review* 120(November-December):161-68. p164

239 Ging, Debbie. 2017. “Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere.” *Men and Masculinities*:1-20. p3

*Taking the blue pill means switching off and living a life of delusion; taking the red pill means becoming enlightened to life's ugly truths. The Red Pill philosophy purports to awaken men to feminism's misandry and brainwashing, and is the key concept that unites all of these communities.*

Ging notes that although the “red pill” meme originated on a relatively obscure online forum (as the subreddit, r/TRP,) it has since proliferated into other domains of the “manosphere”, the term that is used to refer to the online ecology of sites, memes and message-boards focused on male insecurities and resentments whose content is frequently deeply misogynistic.

### 5.3 Rise of the manosphere

The patriarchal masculinities of the manosphere have thrived in this digital media environment. The masculine coding of the red vs blue pill is clear; “in the alt-right sphere ‘blue pill’ is a term that is usually attached only to men portrayed as spineless, desperate and sexually unappealing to women - all traits antithetical to most understandings of hegemonic masculinity”, Kelly emphasizes.<sup>240</sup> The

manosphere is constructed around a narrative of feminism’s oppression of men, and a rejection of the evidence of men’s patriarchal oppression of women. In this manner, the manosphere has



**The manosphere is constructed around a narrative of feminism’s oppression of men, and a rejection of the evidence of men’s patriarchal oppression of women**

helped to foster a transnational ecology of aggrieved male entitlement and virulent misogyny, so central to the Men’s Rights activism discussed in the previous section. The manosphere’s loose networks, in Ging’s formulation, come together around stories and feelings of men’s “personal suffering to build [an] affective consensus about an allegedly collective, gendered experience, namely men’s position in the social hierarchy as a result of feminism.”<sup>241</sup> As Seymour suggests, “[r]edpilling is, for many of its users, potent self-medication, better than any combination of cognitive behavioural therapy and prescription drugs.”<sup>242</sup>

“The most vehement and explicit attempt

240 Kelly, Annie. 2017. “The Alt-Right: Reactionary Rehabilitation for White Masculinity: Us Alt-Right Extremism Is a Logical Consequence of Mainstream Neo-Conservatism.” *Soundings: A journal of politics and culture* 66(Summer):68-78. p74

241 Ging 2017. p16

242 Seymour, Richard. 2019. p167

to protect a masculinist world-view is the contemporary loose coalition of social and political movements around men's rights and father's rights, with shared roots and overlaps with the alt-right, in the Anglosphere and Europe," Nicholas and Agius make clear.<sup>243</sup> Murdoch notes that "[m]anosphere ideas have snowballed into an ideology that has taken on a life of its own, and for some it has served as a route into wider far-right politics."<sup>244</sup> With reference to the increase proliferation of far-right messaging and memes online under the category of the "alt right",<sup>245</sup> Dibranco emphasizes the deeply concerning trend that "misogyny is not only a significant part of the Alt Right, it's the 'gateway drug' for the recruitment of disaffected White men into racist communities."<sup>246</sup>

The extremist violence of misogyny itself has become evident with the increasingly serious incidents of violence that have been committed by young men predominantly in the United States and Canada who self-identify as incels (involuntary celibates).<sup>247</sup> As a recent study emphasizes:<sup>248</sup>

*While incels have not yet formed organized violent groups or cells, the existing attacks have been premeditated, politically motivated and perpetrated violence against civilians. These factors clearly designate incel attacks as a form of terrorism and require incel ideology to be explored as a form of violent extremism.*

Central to incel ideology are misogynistic notions of gender roles and shared beliefs about heterosexuality, male supremacy and the need to violently reestablish 'traditional' gender norms. Online communities, meeting on message boards and in other internet venues,



**The term “ideological masculinity” has been coined to name this ideological commitment to misogyny and male supremacy, and to insist on it being recognized as itself a form of violent extremism.**

243 Nicholas, L. and C. Agius. 2018. *The Persistence of Global Masculinism: Discourse, Gender and Neo-Colonial Re-Articulations of Violence*. Chan, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. p34

244 Murdoch, Simon. 2019. "Why Understanding the UK Anti-Feminist Movement Is Vital to Countering the Far Right." *Huffington Post*. Retrieved: February 26, 2019 ([https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/anti-feminist-movement-far-right\\_uk\\_5c6ae7cae4b01757c36e8b77](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/anti-feminist-movement-far-right_uk_5c6ae7cae4b01757c36e8b77)). p2

245 The term "Alt-Right", an abbreviation of alternative right, is a loosely connected far-right, white nationalist movement based in the United States. A largely online phenomenon, the alt-right originated in the U.S. during the 2010s, although it has since established a presence in various other countries.

246 Dibranco, Alex. 2017. "Mobilizing Misogyny." Boston, MA: Political Research Associates. p15

247 Hoffman, Bruce, Jacob Ware and Ezra Shapiro. 2

248 Zimmerman, Shannon, Luisa Ryan and David Duriesmith. 2018. "Recognizing the Violent Extremist Ideology of 'Incels'." *Women in International Security Policy Brief*. Washington DC: Women in International Security. p2

validate this misogynistic world view and encourage direct action in pursuit of their goals. The term “ideological masculinity” has been coined to name this ideological commitment to misogyny and male supremacy, and to insist on it being recognized as itself a form of violent extremism.<sup>249</sup> Misogynist online groups, from men’s rights activists, to ‘pick up artist’ communities and incels, have increased in number and size over recent years. The online message board “subreddit r/incels” had roughly 40,000 members when it was shut down in 2017 for inciting violence against women. Recent research highlights the evolution of the manosphere. A 2020 study analyzing 28.8 million posts from six forums and 51 subreddits reports that:<sup>250</sup>

*Milder and older communities, such as Pick Up Artists and Men’s Rights Activists, are giving way to more extremist ones like Incels and Men Going Their Own Way, with a substantial migration of active users. Moreover, our analysis suggests that these newer communities are more toxic and misogynistic than the older ones.*

Indeed, this misogynistic trend has been recognized across diverse expressions of violent extremism. As Zimmerman et al. make clear:<sup>251</sup>

*Incels represent just one end of a spectrum of extremist groups spanning a vast range of political ideologies, all united by militant misogyny. These groups range from white-supremacists and neo-Nazis to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Incels are just one aspect of a violent ideological masculinity, an ideology that is growing.*



**The misogynistic anger and conspiracy thinking that proliferate online, reinforced as they are by the commercial logic of platform capitalism, pose significant threats to the work of gender justice movements**

The misogynistic anger and conspiracy thinking that proliferate online, reinforced as they are by the commercial logic of platform capitalism, pose significant threats to the work of gender justice movements. The appeals such movements make to the ‘facts’ of gender justice are undermined by the “crisis of knowing”

249 Roose, Joshua. 2018. “‘Ideological Masculinity’ That Drives Violence against Women Is a Form of Violent Extremism.” The Conversation.

250 Ribeiro, Manoel Horta, Jeremy Blackburn, Barry Bradlyn, Emiliano De Cristofaro, Gianluca Stringhini, Summer Long, Stephanie Greenberg and Savvas Zannettou. 2020. “The Evolution of the Manosphere across the Web.” Computers and Society 00(00):1-12. p1

251 Zimmerman, Shannon, Luisa Ryan and David Duriesmith. 2018. p3

discussed above. As Doctorow makes clear, “we’re not living through a crisis about what is true, we’re living through a crisis about how we know whether something is true. We’re not disagreeing about facts, we’re disagreeing about epistemology.”<sup>252</sup> The business model of platform capitalism is organized around an attention economy, in which the extraction and exploitation of data relies on fostering a screen ‘addiction’, via the emotional intensities of anger and resentment, easily mobilized for patriarchal purposes. As Seymour emphasizes, the masculinism of social media platforms is not only explicit in misogynistic speech but also implicit in their design:<sup>253</sup>

*For they have created a machinery whose natural hero is the antisocial outsider, the hacker with no ties, the troll, the spammer. They have created a regime of competitive individualism in which perplexity and paranoia are a constant state of being.*

## 5.4 Implications for transforming patriarchal masculinities

At the same time, it is also true that digital technologies have opened up unprecedented opportunities for transnational activism and social justice movement building, needed now more than ever in the midst of the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. From #MeToo, to #BlackLivesMatter, to #GreenNewDeal, digital technologies have enabled political education and organizing across a range of social justice issues. That online educating and organizing can have powerful and immediate offline effects was clear in the protests that swept anti-democratic leaders from power in 2010-12, sometimes characterized as the Facebook revolutions. Equally, the global success of the Occupy movement owed much to its use of digital communication technologies. The fact that platform capitalism is so oppressive should not detract from the fact that the digital tools and protocols used by corporate platforms can also be applied for liberatory purposes. As Eagleton writes:<sup>254</sup>

*In the conjunctural crisis of late capitalism, socialist principles have re-asserted their relevance. Our immediate task is to harness the affective energy of those principles and channel it through digital and non-digital mediums, instead of abandoning the former as a hopelessly*

252 Doctorow, Cory. 2019. “Danah Boyd Explains the Connection between the Epistemological Crisis and the Rise of Far-Right Conspiratorial Thinking.” BoingBoing. Retrieved: May 15, 2019 (<https://boingboing.net/2019/05/07/production-of-ignorance.html>).

253 Seymour 2019. p154

254 Eagleton, Oliver. 2019. “Mind Forged Manacles.” New Left Review 120(November-December):161-68. p168



*corrupted domain.*

But this activism and organizing is shadowed by the enhanced infrastructure of surveillance afforded by these same technologies, which serve as a reminder that digital security must be a priority for the communication channels used by global social change networks such as MenEngage Alliance. The growing influence of media and online space on all aspects of everyday life and political debate, including expressions and experiences of patriarchal masculinities, means that the feminist systems change agenda is necessarily concerned with gender transformative work on media systems. Gender transformative work with men and boys can contribute to this agenda in a number of different ways, in solidarity with feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements. This should include continuing to develop and expand media literacy work, especially with boys and young men, to help them understand the patriarchal effects of sexist representations of women and girls, as well as the desensitizing effects of media portrayals of violence.

There is also an urgent need to develop more contextually-specific analyses of and responses to digital gender-based violence and men's involvement in the manosphere, including strategies for building alternate online community-building spaces for young men in particular, which can support young men in rejecting the misogynistic messaging they are often surrounded with online. Such alternative online communities can also become spaces for building trusting relationships of 'knowing', by sharing factually-based peer knowledge to counter the deliberate spread of false information, not least in relation to the local facts of gender inequalities. In the efforts to act in solidarity with and accountability to the radical systems change agenda of feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements, those involved in gender transformative work with men and boys should also identify ways in which it can contribute to movement critiques of the gender injustices produced by platform capitalism. In participating in online organizing to call for a radical overhaul of platform capitalism and mechanisms of State surveillance of civil society, one must pay greater attention to security and safety issues within its own digital communications with members and partners. ■



The background features a large, dark red triangle on the left side, pointing towards the bottom left. The rest of the background is a light beige color. At the bottom, there are several horizontal, wavy lines in a medium red color, resembling stylized waves or a landscape feature.

# 06 Operational Contexts

Rationale,  
Accountability and  
Social Change

*Most male engagement programming focuses at the individual level—with some work also being done at the community level—without addressing the broader structures of patriarchy within which individuals and relationships operate.*<sup>255</sup>

## 6.1 Gender transformative work with men and boys – for whose sake?

The expansion of programming which self-identifies as “engaging” men and boys in work for gender justice has been significant over the last two and half decades. One indicator for the growth of this field of work is the emergence of MenEngage Alliance itself. In 2009, MenEngage organized the 1st Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality in Rio de Janeiro, which drew over 400 activists, researchers, and practitioners from nearly 80 countries. Five years later, the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium in New Delhi attracted over 1200 participants from 95 countries. The Delhi Declaration and Call to Action from this 2nd Global Symposium affirmed the shared belief of participants that “achieving gender justice requires engaging men and boys for the benefit of women and girls, men and boys themselves, people of all

sexual orientations and gender identities, informed by feminist and human rights principles, organisations, and movements and in a spirit of solidarity.”<sup>256</sup>

Different terms are used to name this field of work, both by those working within it as well as those who interact with it: from “male involvement” to “engaging men and boys” to “men and masculinities work”. But it is perhaps more straightforward to refer to this field of work in terms of its stated purpose, which is to achieve gender justice. What unites this disparate body of work and its diverse components as a “field” is the fundamental goal of dismantling patriarchal systems by working with men and boys to transform patriarchal masculinities, operating at individual, institutional and ideological levels.



**There remain long-standing tensions within gender transformative work with men and boys, however, relating to the guiding rationale for the field itself**

255 ICRW. 2018. “Gender Equity and Male Engagement: It Only Works When Everyone Plays.” Washington DC: International Center for Research on Women. p92

256 <http://menengage.org/resources/delhi-declaration-call-action/>

There remain long-standing tensions within gender transformative work with men and boys, however, relating to the guiding rationale for the field itself. Do we work with men and boys to challenge patriarchal systems for the sake of those most oppressed by gender injustices (i.e. cisgendered, heterosexual women, girls and LGBTQIA+ communities) or should this work also be concerned with the harms men and boys suffer from patriarchal masculinities? A recent study undertaken by the International Center for Research on Women, based on key informant interviews with researchers, implementers, and funders who are working in the field of “male engagement” in Latin America, Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, concludes that the “dilemma lies in avoiding the premise that men and boys ought to be engaged in women’s empowerment solely or predominantly from an instrumental perspective, serving only the interests of women and girls.”<sup>257</sup> Instead, the study found “[m]any participants independently express[ing] support for an alternative framing with a larger and more inclusive goal: engaging men as partners—stakeholders, co-beneficiaries, and change agents—in working towards gender equality and gender equity.”<sup>258</sup>

This language of “co-beneficiaries” builds on that used in the background paper prepared for the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium in New Delhi in 2014. Here, it was suggested that the framing of men as allies or partners to women in the latter’s struggle for gender justice “does not fully capture men’s role or stake in gender equality” by neglecting “the ways in which men’s lives also improve with greater gender equality, including with equal rights and empowerment for women.”<sup>259</sup> Instead, the paper urges “a more accurate reflection of the range and depth of gains from gender equality” by insisting on men’s roles and responsibilities “as stakeholders and co-beneficiaries in




**There are continuing concerns about what this emphasis on men and boys as “co-beneficiaries” means in practice for how the field of gender transformative work with men and boys operates, and understands its relationship and responsibilities to broader gender justice movements**

257 ICRW. 2018. p13

258 Ibid. p19

259 Ricardo, Christine. 2014. “Men, Masculinities, and Changing Power: A Discussion Paper on Engaging Men in Gender Equality from Beijing 1995 to 2015.” MenEngage Alliance and UN Women. p23

advancing gender-equality.”<sup>260</sup>



There are continuing concerns about what this emphasis on men and boys as “co-beneficiaries” means in practice for how the field of gender transformative work with men and boys operates, and understands its relationship and responsibilities to broader gender justice movements. The MenEngage Global Symposium 2014 background paper, cited above, itself notes that “there are concerns that the work with men and boys has become a goal in and of itself and that some interventions with men fail to adequately challenge patriarchy and power imbalances in relationships between women and men.”<sup>261</sup> Furthermore, the paper notes that while “there is growing recognition of the need to engage men and boys in challenging patriarchal systems and culture,” there is also “concern that men’s involvement in these movements reproduces patterns of men’s power and privilege and threatens women’s leadership of the movement.”<sup>262</sup> A more trenchant version of this critique has been articulated more recently by the Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM). In a 2017 paper, COFEM warns of “a parallel system” emerging, of “male engagement campaigns, programmes, organisations and networks that, although allied theoretically to feminist principles, stand largely independent of the women’s movement.”<sup>263</sup> In specific national contexts, this critique has extended to a concern that efforts to engage men are distorting the mission of the gender justice movement, leading to what has been called the “masculinization of gender justice work”. In research on such work with men and boys in the Netherlands, van Huis found that what started as a program focused on reaching out to and connecting with men in order to enlist their support for women’s empowerment over time became focused on men’s own vulnerabilities, to the point where some projects dropped their goal of women’s empowerment altogether.<sup>264</sup> The

260 Ibid. p24

261 Ibid. p43

262 Ibid. p43

263 COFEM. 2017. “How a Lack of Accountability Undermines Work to Address Violence against Women and Girls.” *Feminist Perspectives on Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls Paper No. 1*. Coalition of Feminists for Social Change. p5

264 van Huis, Iris. 2014. “Better Men? Gendered Culturalized Citizenship in Male Emancipation Projects in the Netherlands.” Pp. 137-58 in *Masculinities in a Global Era*, edited by J. Gelfer. New

International Rescue Committee designed its Engaging Men through Accountable Practice (EMAP), a one-year GBV prevention program developed for humanitarian settings, partly in response to its evaluation of a Male Involvement Project in Liberia, which found that discussions became too male-focused and that patriarchal power showed up, unchallenged, in group meetings.<sup>265</sup>

A 2017 study identified similar dynamics in transnational spaces and processes, concluding that funding mechanisms are (re)producing inequalities among NGOs in the field and that many feminist activists and leaders have specific concerns about the impact of efforts to engage men on existing funding and political space for work on women's rights, not least in arenas of intergovernmental policy-making. Moreover, it found that the framing of efforts to engage men and boys increasingly emphasizes men's gendered vulnerabilities rather than women's rights and empowerment.<sup>266</sup> Concerns around this work were further exposed in July 2019, with the publication of a systematic review on interventions involving men in supporting SRHR by WHO. It showed

that, of the interventions reviewed, only 8% aimed to challenge unequal gender power relations and the majority showed inconclusive results.<sup>267</sup>

## 6.2 Gender transformative work with men and boys – staying accountable

Key to this work is a teasing out of the personal and organizational aspects of accountability, in terms of both practices and mechanisms. Collaboration and solidarity with women's rights work must be at the core of the gender transformative work with men and boys, which will also mean it is incumbent upon individuals and organizations to "demonstrate good faith and speak out [...] when there is a genuine critique advanced about the nature in which an ally, including male colleagues and partners, is undermining work to address VAWG."<sup>268</sup> The "ally" framework is significant, for the framing of men as allies to women in the struggle for gender equality is, as Casey

York: Springer.

265 [https://www.fsnnetwork.org/sites/default/files/IRC-EMAP-Introductory-Guide-High-Res%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.fsnnetwork.org/sites/default/files/IRC-EMAP-Introductory-Guide-High-Res%20(1).pdf)

266 Leek, Cliff. 2017. "At What Cost? Funding and Political Space to Engage Men in Global Feminist Activism." Doctor of Philosophy, The Graduate School, Stony Brook University, New York State.

267 Ruane-McAteer, Eimear, Avni Amin, Jennifer Hanratty, Fiona Lynn, Kyrsten Corbijn van Willenswaard, Esther Reid, Rajat Khosla and Maria Lohan. 2019. "Interventions Addressing Men, Masculinities and Gender Equality in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: An Evidence and Gap Map and Systematic Review of Reviews." *BMJ Global Health* 4(5):e001634.

268 COFEM. 2017. p8

suggests, “predicated on the notion that institutionalized oppression will persist until members of ‘dominant’ social groups become actively involved in ending it.”<sup>269</sup> To do so in an accountable way has long been understood to mean that allies must follow the leadership of those most affected by the oppression in question. For many feminist groups and activists, accountability is first and foremost about “[p]romoting and ensuring women and girls’ leadership in work” on violence and gender equality more broadly, and “[e]nsuring that male involvement efforts demonstrably empower women and girls.”<sup>270</sup> To respond to these issues, MenEngage Alliance developed its Accountability Standards, and related technical support materials, with the aim to strengthen capacities to uphold quality standards and accountable practices throughout the Alliance, and provide useful guidance for anyone working to transform patriarchal masculinities or engage men and boys, especially for those seen as leaders within this area of work. These efforts of the Alliance and its members have been well received, both among the Alliance membership and by gender justice activists, leaders and donors more broadly (OHCHR, 2018).



**Building gender equality coalitions led by those most affected by gender injustice (including people with non-normative gender identities and expressions and sexual orientations) requires a practice of accountability informed by shared analyses of gender injustice**

As already noted, there has been a move within the “men for gender justice” field to prefer a language of “co-beneficiary” and “stakeholder” over that of ally, in order to emphasize the benefits to men and boys themselves of their anti-patriarchal work. But the extent to which this preference signals a dilution of commitment to the principle that those most affected by patriarchal oppression must be in the leadership of movements to address it remains a question of live debate. This debate is complicated by the fact that, at the organizational level, much of the work of engaging men and boys in building gender justice is not done by dedicated male-focused organizations but by women’s rights organizations themselves. Over one-third of attendees at the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium in 2014 self-identified as representatives of women’s rights groups.

Building gender equality coalitions led by those most affected by gender injustice (including people with non-normative gender

269 Casey, Erin. 2010. “Strategies for Engaging Men as Anti-Violence Allies: Implications for Ally Movements.” *Advances in Social Work* 11(2):267-82. p267

270 COFEM. 2017. p2

identities and expressions and sexual orientations) requires a practice of accountability informed by shared analyses of gender injustice. The implication of the above is that to make progress on these issues of accountability and solidarity, there is a need not only to strengthen individual and organizational practices of accountability, but also to develop a shared understanding of the transformative systems change feminist agenda to which one must be accountable. The challenge, then, is to accompany continuing work on accountability with an increased emphasis on clarifying and articulating Alliance-wide understandings of the functions of patriarchal masculinities at individual, institutional and ideological levels within gender injustice, as the basis for contributing to feminist struggles for both personal and structural transformation.

## 6.3

### **Gender transformative work with men and boys – shifting attention to social change**

To do so, however, will require that the field of gender transformative work with men and boys address the ways in which the work itself fosters a focus on the personal aspects of “working with men and boys” to the relative neglect of strategies to transform patriarchal structures. This neglect continues to be noted. COFEM has argued that “the framing of much male involvement work focuses solely on the individual and relational aspects of masculinity rather than engaging in transformative work that challenges the fundamental assumptions upon which masculinities are constructed.”<sup>271</sup> In their 2013 research study of organizations that engage men and boys in preventing violence against women and girls in Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, and North and South Americas, Casey et.al. similarly found an emphasis on the personal and relational and a “lack of concomitant social change strategies within the institutional, peer, and community networks in which men spend most of their time,” noting that this “may undermine or directly threaten men’s efforts

271 COFEM. 2017. p6

to address gender-based violence and create equity.”<sup>272</sup> A 2015 survey of gender-transformative interventions for men in health programming similarly made

male engagement efforts need to occur at the institutional and policy levels to create more systematic and sustainable changes.”<sup>274</sup>



**This will require that the field of gender transformative work with men and boys reflect more intentionally and intensively on the ways in which some of the key concepts that have driven and shaped the emergence of the field have limited its capacity to develop both structural understandings of and strategies for gender justice**

the recommendation that “[g]iven that gender-transformative programming for men currently includes few examples of structural interventions, this is clearly an area that needs to be bolstered in future work.”<sup>273</sup> ICRW concluded its review of the “men for gender justice” field by insisting that “in order to create more sustainable gender norm transformation, simultaneous

This will require that the field of gender transformative work with men and boys reflect more intentionally and intensively on the ways in which some of the key concepts that have driven and shaped the emergence of the field have limited its capacity to develop both structural understandings of and strategies for gender justice. This includes the category of “men and boys” itself, whose unwitting homogenization of the diversity of men and boys has tended to understate the degree to which men’s experiences and expressions of patriarchal masculinities are profoundly shaped by their positioning within hierarchies of power, structured not only by gender, but also by class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age and citizenship/nationality. One effect of this homogenization has been to prioritize attention to the ‘domestic’ as the scene of gender transformative change in men’s lives, based on the (heteronormative) assumption that what most, if not all, men share is a domestic relationship with women. Hence the emphasis on “individual and relational aspects of

272 Casey, E. A., J. Carlson, C. Fraguera-Rios, E. Kimball, T. B. Neugut, R. M. Tolman and J. L. Edleson. 2013. “Context, Challenges, and Tensions in Global Efforts to Engage Men in the Prevention of Violence against Women: An Ecological Analysis.” *Men and Masculinities* 16(2):228-51. p246

273 Dworkin, Shari L., Paul J. Fleming and Christopher J. Colvin. 2015. “The Promises and Limitations of Gender-Transformative Health Programming with Men: Critical Reflections from the Field.” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 17(sup2):128-43. p133

274 ICRW. 2018. p92



masculinity” to the relative neglect of “concomitant social change strategies.”

Equally, the framing of gender transformative strategies with men and boys in terms of transforming “harmful norms of masculinities” has tended to privilege social psychological accounts of harmful behavior over structural analyses of male supremacy, in its interactions with other forces of oppression. That the dominant social norms paradigm has a tendency to de-politicize gender transformative work has been discussed above. Re-politicizing such work requires a recognition that structural interventions and social change strategies concerned with the distribution and exercise of social, economic and political power must necessarily be intersectional in their analysis, and focused on not merely individual but also institutional and ideological change.

In turn, this suggests that “as a critical and more holistic domain, social action is inclusive of all genders’ and communities’ efforts and is therefore the point at which men’s engagement ceases to be a separate consideration or goal.”<sup>275</sup> In other words, a focus on social action for gender transformation calls into question the rationale for a separate field of “men for gender justice” work itself. The challenge for the field is to foster ways of working with men and boys on patriarchal masculinities which are grounded in a commitment to significant social change, and to the social justice struggles on which such change depends.

## 6.4 Decolonizing gender transformative work with men and boys

Social justice struggles across the world confront the legacies of colonialism and current realities of neocolonial economic relations between the Global North and Global South, including the aid

275 Casey, Erin, Juliana Carlson, Sierra Two Bulls and Aurora Yager. 2016. “Gender Transformative Approaches to Engaging Men in Gender-Based Violence Prevention: A Review and Conceptual Model.” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*:1-16. p12





**This analysis of the mutually reinforcing systems of male supremacy and white supremacy, and the colonial histories and neocolonial structures which produce these systems, has important implications for gender transformative work with men and boys, and MenEngage Alliance itself**

industry itself. The feminist convening at Mexico City was clear that “[a]s systemic drivers of women’s oppression and inequality”, it is “the insidious contemporary incarnations of patriarchy, white supremacy, and colonialism” that “form an interlocking system that must be confronted.”<sup>276</sup> The radical changes called for by the feminist systems change agenda focus on these “persistent structures of colonialism and neocolonialism” which continue to “play out in economic, social, and political systems both within and between nations [...]”<sup>277</sup>

This analysis of the mutually reinforcing systems of male supremacy and white supremacy, and the colonial histories and neocolonial structures which produce these systems, has important implications for gender transformative work with men and boys, and MenEngage Alliance itself. Majority of the organizations and individuals operate within a global architecture of aid and development, which is rooted in these colonial histories. That this architecture is neocolonial in its structuring of power relations between “Global North” and “Global South” has long been recognized, though now more openly discussed within the aid sector itself. A recent statement by the UK-based Gender and Development Network’s Women of Colour Forum makes clear that:<sup>278</sup>

*Time after time, the international aid sector has failed to make the space for rigorous discussions about systemic racism and White supremacy and the ways in which they work to uphold structures and authorities – international, national and local – that perpetuate the racism and paternalism of international aid and development.*

For MenEngage Alliance as a social change network, with regional networks spanning South and North, its important and urgent to both recognize and contest these “structures and authorities – international, national and local – that perpetuate the racism and paternalism of international aid and development.” Part of this contestation must involve acknowledging that this field’s structures

276 Anon. 2019. p1-2

277 Ibid. p9

278 Gender and Development Network’s Women of Colour Forum. 2020. “Collective Statement on Systemic Racism and White Supremacy in the Uk International Aid Sector.” London, UK: Gender and Development Network (GADN) Women of Colour (WOC) Forum. p1

and processes and organizing. If necessary commitments to decolonizing our practices require this self-reflection on internal processes and structures, it also calls for greater self-awareness about the systems of knowledge production on which the field of gender transformative work with men and boys has been built. Leading masculinities scholar Raewyn Connell notes the need to understand and address the “coloniality” of masculinities; that ideas about and practices of masculinities and femininities have long been shaped by colonial histories and neocolonial realities. A growing number of scholars and researchers from the Global South are documenting this:<sup>279</sup>

*Taken together, they highlight the effects of colonization, the consequences of racial hierarchies, and the cultural and psychological correlates of global economic dependence. If we take such concerns, not as marginal but as central to the analysis of masculinity, a major change in the field of study becomes possible.*

In this way, “rather than speaking of the globalization of gender, it is more accurate to speak of the coloniality of gender.”<sup>280</sup> But much of the knowledge informing gender transformative work with men and boys is produced by an “economy of knowledge” that privileges neocolonial perspectives. There remains a widespread use of terms such as “traditional masculinity” which is infused with colonial perspectives on a linear conception of progress, from the backward to the modern. As Connell writes:<sup>281</sup>

*A great deal of metropolitan discussion involves a linear vision of historical succession. There is a past, often associated with a vague idea of ‘traditional’ masculinity; and there is a present, associated with ‘modern’ masculinities. There is also a literature that contrasts modernist with postmodernist perspectives on masculinity; this also involves an idea of succession within the metropolitan container. [...] Once the coloniality of gender is recognized, we can no longer be*



**But much of the knowledge informing gender transformative work with men and boys is produced by an “economy of knowledge” that privileges neocolonial perspectives**

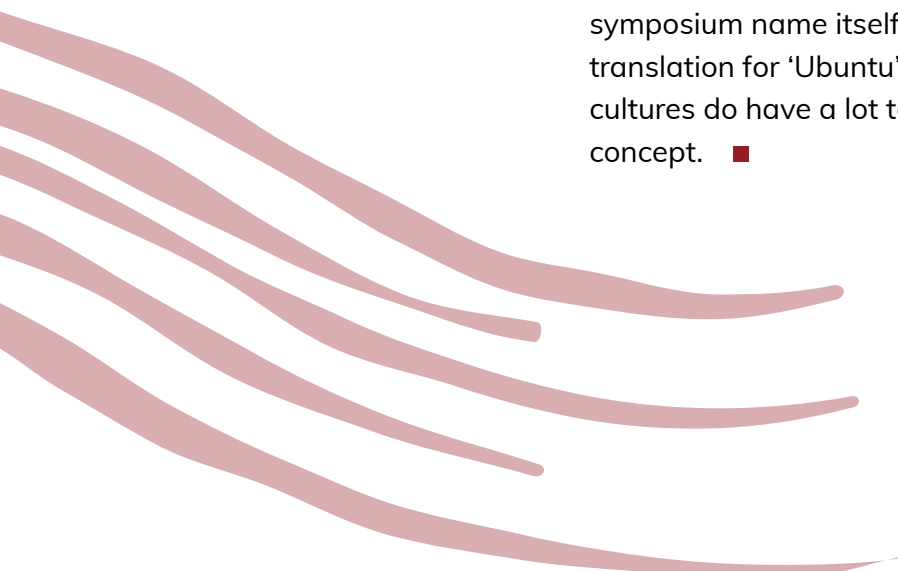
279 Connell, Raewyn. 2014. “Margin Becoming Centre: For a World-Centred Rethinking of Masculinities.” *NORMA: The International Journal for Masculinity Studies* 9(4):217-31. p224

280 Ibid. p220

281 Ibid. p224

*satisfied with linear successions of time in thinking about masculinity.*

An important component of decolonizing the practices is to heed the “[c]alls to rethink ideas about masculinity from post-colonial or global-South starting points” and contribute to the production and sharing of knowledge about masculinities that takes full account of the colonial histories and neocolonial dynamics referred to above.<sup>282</sup> One aspiration of the 2020-21 Ubuntu Symposium is to think and act in ways that support decolonized organizing. This is embodied in the symposium name itself. While the colonial languages have no direct translation for ‘Ubuntu’, the Global North and dominant Western cultures do have a lot to learn from this fundamentally human concept. ■



282 Ibid. p218



# 07 Ways Forward

## 7.1

### Grounding our work in shared commitments

The context analyses presented above make clear the scale and severity of the challenges facing gender justice movements. For all those involved in efforts to dismantle patriarchal systems through gender transformative work with men and boys on patriarchal masculinities, the challenges are particularly acute. Not only must this work move beyond its current emphasis on individual-level change to address the institutional and ideological structuring of male supremacy, but it must do so in ways that strengthen rather than undermine gender justice movement-building, and that take leadership from and be accountable to



**To meet these challenges, collectively and effectively, MenEngage Alliance recognizes that the work of our members and constituent networks must be aligned around a set of shared commitments**

those most targeted by gender injustice, namely women, girls and LGBTQIA+ communities.

To meet these challenges, collectively and effectively, MenEngage Alliance recognizes that the work of our members and constituent networks must be aligned around a set of shared commitments. As the field accountable to feminist and social justice movements and operating in widely differing political, economic and social settings across the world, this alignment is needed to nurture a sense of common purpose and collective unity. The foundation for such shared commitments, as highlighted in the mission of MenEngage Alliance, is to contribute to efforts to transform unequal power relations and dismantle patriarchal systems by:

- Transforming masculinities and rigid, harmful norms around 'being a man';
- Working with men and boys on gender justice through intersectional feminist approaches;
- Building inclusive collaborations from local to regional to global levels; and
- Developing joint actions in partnership with and accountability to women's rights, gender- and other social justice movements.

In support of this mission, and to meet the challenges discussed above, we believe that the field of 'gender transformative work with men and boys' should come together around the following set of shared commitments.

**Human rights:** The promotion and protection of universal human rights are fundamental to the work of the Alliance.

From the local to the global level, this field should promote the mandates, statements of action, and principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) and its annual reviews through the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) statements, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and works collectively to encourage governments to do the same.

**Feminist principles and vision:** This area of work need to be firmly rooted in feminist principles and analysis, taking inspiration from historical and contemporary feminist struggles to dismantle patriarchy, and leadership from women's rights organizations and coalitions across the globe. As the Delhi Declaration and Call to Action, agreed at the conclusion of the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium in 2014, makes clear:<sup>283</sup>

*We owe our awareness of gender injustices, our efforts to promote equality, and the occurrence of this Symposium itself to the pioneering courage and vision of feminist and women's rights movements. We align with the work of women's rights organizations and*

*recognize all achievements in the transformation of the social, cultural, legal, financial and political structures that sustain patriarchy.*

**Gender justice:** At its core, the field of gender transformative work with men and boys should seek to destabilize patriarchal masculinities and male supremacy, and to support manifestations of non-violent, equitable and inclusive notions of manhood. In doing so, one must understand gender injustice to be the product of gender hierarchies (of men over women, male over female, masculine over feminine), which themselves are rooted in a binary system of gender relations that privileges cisgendered, heteronormative masculinity above all other gender identities and expressions. We need to recognize that underpinning this work must be a commitment to the Yogyakarta Principles, the main international instrument outlining human rights with respect to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).<sup>284</sup>

**Social justice:** The feminist analysis brings to the fore the complexity that patriarchy does not exist in isolation from other systems and relations of power and, consequently, adopts an intersectional approach to its work. This recognizes that oppressive ideologies


283 MenEngage Alliance. 2014. "Men and Boys for Gender Justice: Delhi Declaration and Call to Action." 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium: Men and Boys for Gender Justice. New Delhi, India.

284 <https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/>

and institutions (sexism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be addressed separately from one another. The complex interplay of multiple identities and positions within hierarchies of power can increase vulnerability and further entrench inequalities and injustice. Those who are involved in gender transformative work with men and boys should aim to contribute to an intersectional analysis of this work and enhance an intersectional approach in their works. In doing so, the work need to center feminist analysis and vision: acknowledges patriarchy is at the roots of gender-based power inequalities, and recognize the need to address male power and privilege.

**Decolonization:** Central to this intersectional understanding of the gender transformative work with men and boys is the recognition that gender relations and hierarchies have long been shaped by histories of colonialism. We recognize our own location within and dependency on a system of international aid and development which, irrespective of intentions, perpetuates a neocolonial paternalism between global North and South. Those involved in gender transformative work with men and boys should question and unpack how colonial, eurocentric and hegemonic structures of power continue to produce contemporary inequalities, within the world and our own organizing as a reflection of this world. We must commit to reflect on how these highly unequal structures can be addressed, toward decolonizing our practices.

**Anti-racism:** We acknowledge the importance and urgency of making space for rigorous discussions about systemic racism and white supremacy within our own coordination and governance structures, as well as supporting member organizations to do the same. Everyone who is involved in the gender transformative work with men and boys must ensure to an ongoing process of collective self-reflection and self-education on the manifestations of systemic racism and white supremacy in our structures, staffing, operations and strategies, toward specifying time-bound, resourced and measurable approaches to make our practices in all these domains anti-racist.



**Men and boys must ensure to an ongoing process of collective self-reflection and self-education on the manifestations of systemic racism and white supremacy in our structures, staffing, operations and strategies, toward specifying time-bound, resourced and measurable approaches to make our practices in all these domains anti-racist**



**Accountability:** We share the mission of transforming masculinities and working with men and boys on gender justice through intersectional feminist approaches; in other words, we work with those who most benefit from patriarchal systems in order to dismantle those very systems. Thus, we come together and act in solidarity with women's rights organizations, LGBTQIA+ organizations and movements for intersectional feminism and gender justice more broadly. This commitment to solidarity requires a deep understanding and practice of accountability, and acknowledgement of the long history of work with men and boys already undertaken by feminist movements over many decades. We believe Accountability should be at



**In partnering with and taking leadership from movements of those most targeted by gender injustice and patriarchal systems, it is their collective analyses and assumptions about how best to dismantle such systems that must guide the gender transformative work with men and boys**

the core of those involved in gender transformative work with men and boys and involve in taking the responsibility

to consult closely with, listen to, take leadership from and partner equally with the organizations and leaders representing those most affected by gender injustice and patriarchal systems. Building the internal capacities and processes that are necessary to deepen understanding and practices of accountability across all levels of our work will continue to be a major focus for MenEngage Alliance and members.

## 7.2 Clarifying our understanding of change processes

In partnering with and taking leadership from movements of those most targeted by gender injustice and patriarchal systems, it is their collective analyses and assumptions about how best to dismantle such systems that must guide the gender transformative work with men and boys. This requires a continuing dialogue with gender justice movement partners about philosophies of, and approaches to, transformational change that make more explicit underlying assumptions of how and why change might happen, and about the contributions that this work can make to this larger transformational agenda for gender justice.

Within this emphasis on a process-driven and adaptive approach to the theory of change, MenEngage Alliance is also clear that its mission to “transform unequal

power relations and dismantle patriarchal systems” by “transforming masculinities” and Gu “working with men and boys on gender justice through intersectional feminist approaches” requires that we specify the meaning of these terms. Only with this clarity we envision to enter conversations about a transformational agenda for gender justice with an understanding of the specific contributions it can make to answering the following questions:

WHAT is to be changed?

WHO are the agents of change?

HOW will change be achieved?

### 7.2.1

#### WHAT is to be changed?

Every society has a gender order; an arrangement of political, economic and social relations of power reflecting and reinforcing ideas about gender differences and hierarchies, and expressed in personal attitudes and behaviors, institutional policies and practices, and societal traditions and belief-systems. In most societies, the gender order is organized around heteronormative cisgendered binary system, which privileges men over women, masculinity over femininity, heterosexuality over other sexual orientations and cis over trans gender identities. These expressions of the binary gender order that operates in most societies are based on the meanings and valuations attached to notions of masculinity and femininity, which underpin inequalities between men and women and gender hierarchies more generally. For this reason, gender equality work targeted at men and boys has focused on changing “masculinities,” and in particular, challenging “patriarchal masculinities.”



**Patriarchal masculinities are those ideas about and practices of masculinity that emphasize the superiority of masculinity over femininity and the authority of men over women**

Patriarchal masculinities are those ideas about and practices of masculinity that emphasize the superiority of masculinity over femininity and the authority of men over women. Ideas about and practices of patriarchal masculinities serve to maintain gender inequalities and power hierarchies more broadly. They are expressed individually (in attitudes and behavior), institutionally (in policies and practices) and ideologically (in social norms and cultural narratives.) We acknowledge that the gender transformative work with men

and boys, diverse as they are, work on many issues related to gender injustice, but they should share a common interest in understanding the operations of patriarchal masculinities in maintaining and deepening such injustice and in identifying ways of challenging and transforming such masculinities in order to secure gender justice. This work needs to seek to destabilize stereotypical male gender roles and hegemonic expressions of manhood, and support manifestations of non-violent, equitable and inclusive notions of manhood, by changing social norms that shape boys' and men's behavior.

As the context analyses in this Discussion Paper makes clear, the need to do so has never been greater, with a resurgence of patriarchal gender conservatism and the rise to power of explicitly misogynist political leaders in a number of countries. Developing gender transformative ways to challenge patriarchal masculinities at the individual level remains an ongoing concern, especially for the members of MenEngage Alliance. Yet, as discussed in Section 6, the field of gender transformative work with men and boys has been critiqued, both by its own practitioners as well as by those with whom it seeks to ally, for being too focused on individual-level change strategies. The Evaluation of our own work over the period of the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan echoes this, noting that more attention must be given to supporting members to deepen their

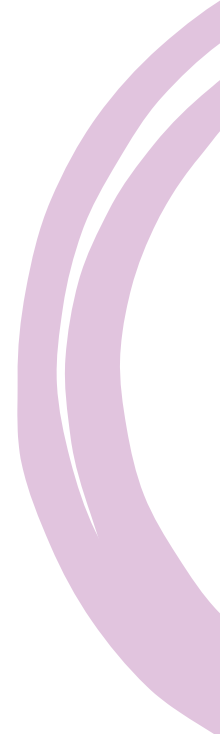
analyses of patriarchal masculinities at the institutional and ideological levels, and to develop gender transformative strategies for institutional and ideological change.

### 7.2.2

#### **WHO are the agents of change?**

Movements for gender justice center the leadership and experiences of those most targeted by gender injustice. But from the earliest days of the women's movement and gay liberation movement, men were coming together as pro-feminist and straight allies in support of such movements. It was recognized that not only had such men a role to play in these liberation struggles, but also a responsibility to undo the systems of power and privilege from which they benefit. In many ways, MenEngage Alliance came together in order to answer a set of questions relating to how best to 'engage' those who are privileged by patriarchal systems ("men and boys") in dismantling these very systems, while acknowledging that men and boys are also affected by these patriarchal systems.

The gender transformative works with men and boys in transforming patriarchal masculinities are being undertaken with many different communities and constituencies including people of all genders and sexualities, but they must share a common interest in supporting those who are privileged by patriarchal systems to be agents of change in transforming these systems. In recent



years, a number of organizations and networks, including MenEngage Global Alliance, have developed significant sets of resources on Accountability and Allyship to ensure that this work with men as agents of change remains fully accountable to the leadership and experiences of those most targeted by gender injustice. The Evaluation of MenEngage Alliance's Strategic Plan 2017-20 implementation attests to the importance and influence of these resources, and the continuing need to support their uptake.



**It has also become clear over the last four years that gender transformative work with men and boys must take account of the heterogeneity of the category “men and boys” and that patriarchal power and privileges are shaped by many other forces and factors of marginalization and oppression**

It has also become clear over the last four years that gender transformative work with men and boys must take account of the heterogeneity of the

category “men and boys” and that patriarchal power and privileges are shaped by many other forces and factors of marginalization and oppression. As leading scholar of masculinities Raewyn Connell has emphasized: Class, race, national, regional, and generational differences cross-cut the category “men,” spreading the gains and costs of gender relations very unevenly among men. There are many situations where groups of men may see their interest as more closely aligned with the women in their communities than with other men.<sup>285</sup>

Working as they often do with women and men together, we find our members and partners well-placed to mobilize men and boys as agents of change around their shared interests with women in their communities. But to do so effectively requires a deeper understanding of and engagement with the intersecting forces of oppression that spread “the gains and costs of gender relations very unevenly among men.” A clear finding from the Evaluation of the implementation of the Alliance Strategic Plan 2017-20 is the need for those doing gender transformative work with men and boys to deepen our intersectional approach to “engaging men and boys,” and to develop ways to link with other struggles for social justice (e.g. on economic justice and racial justice) as part of our efforts to mobilize men as agents of change for gender justice. This intersectional approach

285 Connell, R. W. 2005. “Change among the Gatekeepers: Men, Masculinities, and Gender Equality in the Global Arena.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30(3):1801-25. p1809

also directs attention to the men who benefit most from patriarchal systems. As Connell again reminds us, on “a global scale, the men who benefit from corporate wealth, physical security, and expensive health care are a very different group from the men who provide the workforce of developing countries.”<sup>286</sup> Developing strategies to demand change from the men at the top of gender and related hierarchies remains a key priority.

### 7.2.3

#### **HOW will change be achieved?**

MenEngage Alliance, initially, came together around the question of how best to ‘engage’ men in efforts to dismantle patriarchal systems and promote gender justice, we have been concerned with what it means to do “gender transformative” work with men. Three broad areas of work have emerged as being constitutive of the gender transformative contribution that work with men as agents of change in transforming patriarchal masculinities can make to the broader struggles for gender justice being led by feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements, namely: programming with men for personal change and social action; support to policy and political advocacy by women’s rights and LGBTQIA+ movements; and gender justice movement building with women’s rights and LGBTQIA+ organizations.

#### **Programming with men for personal change and social action:**

Taking its cue from the feminist insight that the “personal is political”, an early and continuing focus of gender transformative programming with men and boys has been to change personal attitudes and interpersonal behaviors. On issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, parenting and care work and the prevention of gender-based violence, there is an emerging body of evidence to show that such gender transformative programming can be effective at the individual level of change.<sup>287 288</sup> Over time, such programming

286 Ibid. p1809

287 Edström, Jerker, Alexa Hassink, Thea Shahroksh and Erin Stern. 2015. “Engendering Men: A Collaborative Review of Evidence on Men and Boys in Social Change and Gender Equality.” EMERGE Evidence Review. Promundo-US, Sonke Gender Justice and the Institute of Development Studies.

288 Casey, Erin, Juliana Carlson, Sierra Two Bulls and Aurora Yager. 2016. “Gender Transformative Approaches to Engaging Men in Gender-Based Violence Prevention: A Review



**Given the growing visibility and influence of men's rights activism in many parts of the world, there is a pressing need to continue to expand the reach and enhance the impact of this gender transformative work with men for personal change and social action**

has expanded to include strategies to address change in patriarchal social norms through social action campaigns, and there is a growing recognition of the need for more emphasis on working with men to change the patriarchal cultures of male-dominated institutions, such as the military and law enforcement organizations.<sup>289</sup> Given the growing visibility and influence of men's rights activism in many parts of the world, there is a pressing need to continue to expand the reach and enhance the impact of this gender transformative work with men for personal change and social action.

#### **Support to policy and political advocacy by women's rights and LGBTQIA+ movements:**

Legal and policy change to promote and protect the human rights of women and LGBTQIA+ communities continues to be a significant focus of women's rights and LGBTQIA+ movements. Patriarchal, homophobic and transphobic law and policy reinforce and reflect patriarchal masculinities, and organizations working with men as agents of change to transform patriarchal masculinities have a role to play in supporting the efforts of women's rights and LGBTQIA+ movements to change such law and policy. Many MenEngage Alliance members are involved in supporting such policy advocacy and in speaking out against the manifestations of patriarchal political cultures in their societies. As the discussion of political context in Section 2 makes clear, a growing authoritarianism and patriarchal backlash threaten the legislative and policy gains that have been won. Working in solidarity with women's rights and LGBTQIA+ movements to defend and advance these gains is an important task for gender transformative work with men.

#### **Gender justice movement building with women's rights and LGBTQIA+ organizations:**

Significant social change to address entrenched inequalities and patriarchal hierarchies depends on progressive organizations coming together in a broad movement for structural change. Recent years have witnessed an upsurge in such movement activism and protest by women's rights and LGBTQIA+ organizations in response to the patriarchal backlash discussed in

and Conceptual Model." Trauma, Violence, & Abuse:1-16.

289 Peacock, Dean and Gary Barker. 2014. "Working with Men and Boys to Prevent Gender-Based Violence: Principles, Lessons Learned, and Ways Forward." Men and Masculinities 17(5):578-99.

this paper. There is a growing recognition within the “men for gender equality” field that an important aspect of gender transformative work with men and boys must be to act in solidarity with and help to reinforce efforts by women’s rights and LGBTQIA+ organizations to build and strengthen broad-based movements for gender justice.

## 7.3

### Focusing on the continuum of gender transformative change

The context analyses presented in this Discussion Paper outline the political, economic and socio-cultural forces structuring gender hierarchies. These analyses have also sought to highlight the ways in which masculinities, expressed in individual behavior, institutional practice and ideological discourse, produce and are reproduced by these hierarchies. We recognize that efforts to transform these patriarchal masculinities must work across a continuum of gender transformative change, from the individual to the institutional to the ideological level.

This Discussion Paper has also reiterated the continuing critique that gender equality work with men and boys, which claims to be gender transformative, has too often been too narrowly concerned with strategies for changing men’s personal attitudes and behaviors. In doing so, such work has paid insufficient attention to developing the analyses, skills and partnerships required for social change strategies at the institutional and ideological levels. This is not to say that personal transformation should no longer be a target of gender transformative work with men and boys. Patriarchal systems are maintained, every day and everywhere, by the daily practice of patriarchy in personal behavior and interpersonal relationships, whether in the home, the workplace or the street. In many societies, it remains the case that patriarchal norms are deeply internalized, and ongoing efforts are needed to support and push men and boys to reflect on, question and challenge their patriarchal privileges and the damage they do in the lives of women and girls, as well as men’s own lives. Indeed, as the forgoing context analyses suggest, the growing appeal of authoritarian strongmen and men’s rights activism, as



**Patriarchal systems are maintained, every day and everywhere, by the daily practice of patriarchy in personal behavior and interpersonal relationships, whether in the home, the workplace or the street**



well as the widespread and increasingly normalized misogyny in public discourse, call for expanded efforts to work directly with men and boys to counter these trends.

To insist on the need for work across a continuum of gender transformative change, then, is to highlight the importance of linking such personal change strategies with social change strategies to challenge the institutional and ideological operations of patriarchal systems. But understanding “gender transformative” in terms of this continuum of change has implications for how the evidence base for this work is both conceived and created. In addition to being critiqued for its neglect of social change strategies, the field of gender equality work with men and boys has also been critiqued for the inadequacy of its evidence base.<sup>290</sup> In view of the evidence that is available, this critique seems overstated.<sup>291</sup> But while it is true that some evaluations of gender equality programming with men and boys do demonstrate that “well-designed interventions can increase participants’ support for gender equality and their gender-equitable practices”, it is

also the case that these interventions tend to be “short-term, single level, and focused only on micro- and meso-level change” with “a short-term project orientation rather than a long-term social change orientation, shaped in part by funding cycles that are too short for large-scale social impact.”<sup>292</sup>

The call for more evidence on which to base the funding for gender transformative work with men and boys must confront the reality that current approaches to project funding and evaluation favor the small-scale behaviorally-focused interventions which the field of gender equality work with men and boys has been urged to expand beyond. A global study with representatives of organizations that engage men and boys in preventing violence against women and girls found that respondents were in agreement about the urgent need to tackle “institutionalized male power within governmental, media, criminal justice, religious, tribal and other community institutions”,<sup>293</sup> but, at the same time:<sup>294</sup>

*Felt at a loss as to how to evaluate the*

290 COFEM. 2017. “Funding: Whose Priorities?” Feminist Perspectives on Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls Series Paper No. 4. Coalition of Feminists for Social Change.

291 Edström, Jerker, Alexa Hassink, Thea Shahrokh and Erin Stern. 2015. “Engendering Men: A Collaborative Review of Evidence on Men and Boys in Social Change and Gender Equality.” EMERGE Evidence Review. Promundo-US, Sonke Gender Justice and the Institute of Development Studies.

292 Greig, Alan and Michael Flood. 2020. “Work with Men and Boys for Gender Equality: A Review of Field Formation, the Evidence Base and Future Directions.” New York, NY: UN Women. p49

293 Casey et al. 2013: 236.

294 Ibid.: 243.



*nuanced and long-term kinds of individual and social change they were hoping to foster with their work, and lamented the mismatch between the timeline of social change and funders' timelines.*

Given this, there is a need to question both the typical timelines of intervention funding and the prevailing orthodoxies about what constitutes evidence and how to assess impact. Efforts to create



### **Different ways to assess impact across the continuum of gender transformative change are needed in order to develop a more politically-informed, structurally-minded evidence base**

structural and systems change rarely show up in summaries of evidence-based practice or promising interventions, in part because their time frames and modalities are ill-suited to the methodological constraints of prevailing evidence-gathering approaches. Different ways to assess impact across the continuum of gender transformative change are needed in order to develop a more politically-informed, structurally-minded evidence

base. As a recent review of the evidence base has noted, we “must ‘count change’ not merely at the level of individuals, but also communities, institutions and social systems.”<sup>295</sup>

This emphasis on working to transform patriarchal masculinities across a continuum of change, from the individual to the institutional to the ideological level, not only demands a more structurally-minded evidence base; it also highlights the priority of movement building over field development. As discussed in Section 6, there is a concern that gender equality work with men and boys has evolved into a separate field of work, in parallel with and often disconnected from ongoing work by women’s rights and LGBTQIA+ movements. While the nature and extent of this field development orientation varies both geographically and organizationally, we recognize both the political responsibility and practical necessity of orienting its work, from the local to the global level, toward contributing to feminist and LGBTQIA+ movement building. The agenda for radical systems change that underpins the visions for gender justice discussed in this Discussion Paper calls for social movement organizing. While such organizing must and will be led by those most targeted by gender injustice, people of all gender identities have important roles to play in supporting and strengthening collective action to



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advance this transformational agenda for gender justice. Far from developing a separate field of gender equality work with men and boys, the challenge for those involved in gender transformative work with men and boys, including MenEngage Alliance, is to develop the analyses, skills and partnerships to enable making meaningful and accountable contributions to such collective action for gender justice. As a recent report makes clear, “[r]ather than seeing “engaging men” as a discrete field with its own logics and intrinsic purpose, it should be seen as a body of practice and expertise that can contribute to broader social justice struggles.”<sup>296</sup>

The scale and severity of the challenges facing such struggles have been discussed throughout this Discussion Paper. Political and economic structures, indeed the eco-system of the planet, are in crisis, with the spread and impacts of COVID-19 being both the latest manifestation of such crises and a warning of what is to come unless radical change is undertaken. In many ways, such crises constitute a crisis of hegemony for political and economic elites. Evidence that we are living through a hegemonic crisis is everywhere around us. In their Notes for a Feminist Manifesto, Arruzza et al. make clear that:<sup>297</sup> we find ourselves at a fork in the road. One path leads to a scorched planet where human life is immiserated, if it remains possible at all. The other points to the sort of world that has always figured in humanity’s dreams: one whose wealth and natural resources are shared by all, where equality and freedom are premises, not aspirations.

Posing the decision in such stark terms makes clear what is at stake. As they continue:<sup>298</sup>

In the current vacuum of liberal hegemony, we have the chance to build another feminism and to re-define what counts as a feminist issue, developing a different class orientation and a radical-transformative ethos. We write not to sketch an imagined utopia, but to clarify the road that must be travelled to reach a just society.

296 Ibid. p55

297 Arruzza et al. 2018: 114.

298 Ibid.

One of the clearest signs of the “current vacuum of liberal hegemony” is the rise of ‘strongman’ authoritarianism and the appeals to the social conservatism of a patriarchal gender order discussed in earlier sections of this paper. This is to say that patriarchal ideas and ideals of masculinity are being renewed in response to the multiple crises (economic, ecological and now epidemiological) with which we are beset. It is clear that patriarchal masculinities, significantly racialized in some national contexts, are being invoked by an increasingly authoritarian strain of political thought and practice in many parts of the world. We think for social change networks and organizations focused on transforming patriarchal masculinities, the challenge is to “look more squarely at and think more clearly about the operations and depredations of elite rule, and the ways in which ideas and ideals of masculinity are deployed in the maintenance of such rule.”<sup>299</sup> People of all gender identities, men included, have an existential stake in the feminist vision of a world “whose wealth and natural resources are shared by all, where equality and freedom are premises, not aspirations.” We are committing do our part and help ensure that this stake becomes the basis for political action by men in support of this radical feminist vision. ■



**This is to say that patriarchal ideas and ideals of masculinity are being renewed in response to the multiple crises (economic, ecological and now epidemiological) with which we are beset**



**MenEngage Alliance**

working with men and boys for gender equality